



THE INDEPENDENT

Nº 3,267

THURSDAY 10 APRIL 1997

WEATHER: Dry and bright (IR45p) 40p



INSIDE THE TABLOID



IN THE TABLOID



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THE SUN
CANCER
AND FASHION

Tories smell blood as New Labour wobbles

Anthony Bevins and Colin Brown

Labour wobbled over privatisation policy yesterday, leaving itself dangerously exposed to concentrated and effective Tory fire for the first time in the run-up to the election.

With Labour leaders openly contradicting each other, the focus of the campaign was diverted from the Tories' own vulnerability on broken tax promises and on sleaze, with Martin Bell's high-profile challenge to Neil Hamilton in Tatten.

The danger of the mid-election crisis was critically illustrated by an ITN Channel 4 News poll last night, showing that half of the voters were still not firmly committed either way, the voters, too, are wobbling.

After John Prescott, Labour's deputy leader, had given an interview in which he stuck strictly to the manifesto line on privatisation - but contradicted a statement by Tony Blair earlier this week - the Prime Minister went for the Labour jugular.

Addressing a public meeting in a market square in Brecon, South Wales, Mr Major said Mr Prescott had escaped from his 'round the world hide-me-if-you-can' campaign tour.

The Prime Minister said that Labour spin doctors had intervened to say there was no policy of privatisation. "They said Labour had an open mind, an open mouth, an open mind, open warfare. That is the real Labour Party up and down the country these days."

Tory strategists said the mood in the Major camp had lifted as a result of Labour's five changes in policy since the launch of their manifesto. "They are clearly unhappy under fire," one leadership source said. "If we can keep up the pressure, we could have a field day."

That pressure was increased by Michael Heseltine, the Deputy Prime Minister, who pounced on a lunchtime ITN

For the first time the Conservatives are coming alive... the election is not wide open but it's not over, either

Andrew Marr, page 21

interview in which Mr Prescott said: "We don't have a policy of directly wanting to privatise anything quite frankly, but we will face the realities of what has to be done with public assets."

But as Tony Blair has said, it's not total privatisation which in many cases hasn't worked.

Mr Heseltine told BBC radio's *World at One*: "John Prescott has completely spat in the eye of the leader of his own party, making it clear that all this stuff about privatisation is just so much for the birds."

But the focus of Tory attack - as with Labour - was on trust. Mr Heseltine said of the Labour leader: "This is a man who has sold every principle he ever had in order to gain power, and he talks about trust."

Fending off such attacks, Mr Blair told his own daily press conference earlier that if he had made - and broken - the promises Mr Major had made in the 1992 election, "I would not have the gall to ask the British people to trust me again."

But as Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, tried to keep attention directed at the Tory tax record - backed by a powerful study from the independent Institute for Fiscal Studies, showing that the tax burden had gone up by £7 a week for the average household since the 1992 election - he was forced to defend the Labour line on privatisation.

Mr Brown repeated that Labour would consider privatisation of the National Air Traffic Control Services, but said there was nothing in the manifesto about the privatisation of any "public provision of goods and services."

The dispute over privatisation also served to deflect attention from Tatten, and the prospective battle between former minister Neil Hamilton - the man at the heart of allegations about the Commons cash-for-questions controversy - and Mr Bell, who announced that he had resigned from the BBC after 35 years' service.

Mr Major was left with no option at his daily press conference: he was cornered into saying that if he had a vote in Tatten, Mr Hamilton's seat, he would vote for him, and he urged all Tories to follow suit.

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Proud beast: A wild stag near Dulverton, Exmoor (above) and the Devon and Somerset staghounds (below)

Photographs: Chris Jones

How it feels to be hunted to death

Nicholas Schoon
Environment Correspondent

A ground-breaking scientific study has reached the conclusion that many unscientific animal-lovers have long believed in - that an animal hunted by humans and hounds goes through a long, dark agony of fear, stress and utter exhaustion.

The stag hound packs which chase red deer in the West Country, on Exmoor and the Quantock Hills, can no longer deny their sport is cruel, said Professor Patrick Bateson, a Cambridge University animal behaviour expert.

His report, published yesterday, concludes that shooting by stalkers is a much more humane way of controlling deer numbers. It was commissioned by the National Trust, whose ruling council is today expected to ban stag-hunting on its land at a special meeting.

The trust's council is also expected to call on the Government to commission a study into the stress which hunting with hounds causes to foxes - and

whether this can now be justified as a way of controlling their numbers. The report could not come at a better time for Labour. Unlike the Conservatives, the party is against hunting with hounds. Its manifesto promises a free vote in Parliament on legislation to outlaw it.

Evolution has left the red deer pitifully unequipped for pursuit by hunters on horseback with dogs. Being "relatively sedentary" they lack the musculature and stamina for the long moorland chases which last on average three hours and cover 12 miles but can range for more than 20. Their natural predator is the wolf and wolf pursuits are much shorter than human ones, the report says.

The evidence of prolonged, acute suffering comes from measuring levels of biochemical stress, pain and cell damage in blood taken from 61 deer immediately after they were held at bay by the hounds then dispatched with a gunshot. Concentrations were compared with those in deer at rest, those critically injured in road accidents and those shot by stalkers.

Professor Bateson said: "It's clear these [hunted] animals are completely depleted of resources - they are desperately affected by long chases. From the point of view of physiology, the results are absolutely unambiguous."

He and Elizabeth Bradshaw, an Oxford University biologist, found pursuit caused the deer's red blood cells to break up. Their damaged muscles leaked chemicals into the bloodstream.

A long chase left their blood plasma, normally clear, tinged magenta red with freed haemoglobin. Blood levels of cortisol, a stress hormone which speeds up heart rate and releases sugar into the blood, leapt at the start of the hunt and rose as it proceeded. So did levels of beta endorphin, a natural chemical similar to morphine involved in pain-control.

The report says deer which escaped the hounds - about half - suffer severe stress, take days to recover and would probably be left more vulnerable to infection and disease.

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Kelly, who works in a studio characterised by plaster casts of elderly human torsos hanging from walls, says his aim is to challenge notions that health and life are the prerequisites of beauty. He has argued that his art immortalises the dead and said: "I would not wish to hurt anyone. While I find beauty in death, these are nevertheless rotting bodies. You look at them and remind yourself, this is how we all end up."

Kelly yesterday said: "I'm helping police as much as I can and I cannot say anything else at the moment."



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Police bail sculptor who crafts bodies

Mark Rowe

The sculptor Anthony-Noel Kelly was last night released on bail by Scotland Yard detectives investigating allegations of theft of parts of dismembered human bodies.

The inquiry follows the discovery of the dismembered body parts of up to 30 people at his studio and at a site in Kent. Forensic scientists are trying to identify the remains, which are thought to have been removed from hospital medical schools.

Kelly, 41, a former abattoir worker and butcher and a nephew of the Duke of Norfolk, has previously admitted smuggling pieces of human corpses into his studio in Clapham, south London, and using them to make plaster casts. The investigation is believed to have been prompted by a complaint from a member of the public that he recognised the face of an elderly man in a silver-coated piece of Kelly's work.



Released: Kelly in his studio

Photograph: David Rose

The piece, involving the head and face with part of the brain cut away, carries a price tag of £4,500 and was displayed at the Contemporary Arts Fair in north London in January. It did not find a buyer. He has previously admitted: "I'm a little bit

worried about the old man in case someone recognises him." Kelly has recently been lecturing twice a week at the Prince of Wales Institute of Architecture. The Institute yesterday declined to comment on his position.

The art of controversy

Damien Hirst: First stirred public consciousness by presenting a sheep pickled in formaldehyde. Gilbert and George: Provoked outrage with artistic experiments involving writhing nudity and an excremental fetish which included huge pictures of human excrement. Jake and Dinos Chapman's *Art of the Repellent*, involves mutant mannequins refashioned to look like products of failed biogenetic experiments. Actress Tilda Swinton spent eight hours a day sleeping on a mattress in a glass case at London's Serpentine Gallery.

A Scotland Yard spokesman said: "Following a request by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Anatomy, officers from the organised crime group are investigating allegations of theft and burying of bodies without consent."

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news

significant shorts

Greenpeace solar protest on roof of BP headquarters

Greenpeace tried to turn the heat up on the energy debate yesterday when activists placed 25 solar panels on the roof of BP Exploration's headquarters. The protesters dressed in orange climbed up the lower part of the building in Aberdeen and laid the panels and two flags around a sign saying "BP Solar not oil".

The environmental pressure group is calling on the company to switch £100m from oil exploration to its subsidiary BP Solar. But a spokesman for BP Exploration dismissed the environmentalists' challenge as a "piecemeal suggestion" and said that as long as there was a demand for oil in the UK, BP would try to meet that demand. He said: "These issues can only be decided by Government and consumers. The world has a demand for oil and the UK oil industry is one of our most successful industries."

Billie-Jo's inquest adjourned

The inquest into the death of murdered schoolgirl Billie-Jo Jenkins was opened and adjourned yesterday until the trial of her father. Billie-Jo, 13, was bludgeoned repeatedly over the head with an 18in metal tent spike as she painted the patio doors of her home in Hastings, East Sussex, on 15 February. Her foster father, Sion Jenkins, 39, is on bail charged with her murder.

Kennedy makes classic return



To the delight of music-lovers and Aston Villa fans, the violinist Nigel Kennedy (left) will give his first major concert tonight since he went into "retirement" in 1992. It marks something of a return for Kennedy, who brought classical music to a mass audience with his interpretation of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. A football devotee who has always seemed to relish the sobriquet "unconventional", Kennedy has shaved off the goatee beard and left behind his punkish clothes which made him famous. However, his punk period has given way to a new style of "street-urchin". After five years away, when he has apparently done very little except "come to terms with himself as a musical free spirit", Kennedy will be performing pieces by Bach, Bartok and Jimi Hendrix at the Royal Festival Hall in central London.

Simon Reeve

Moves to curb rail suicides

Measures were unveiled yesterday to prevent the increasing number of suicides on Britain's railway network by Railtrack, the owners of the nation's track and signalling, and support group the Samaritans. With the number of deaths on the rail network now topping 170 a year, the privatised train services are trying to tackle the problem. Stations will get posters highlighting a dedicated advice line and carry the message: "There is a Samaritan at this station 24 hours a day." The measures were launched on the Great North Eastern Railway, one of the lines with the highest suicide rates on the network. GNER - formerly InterCity East Coast - has seen more than 120 suicides between London and Berwick since the line was fully electrified in July 1991.

Randeep Ramesh

Budgie runs into turbulence



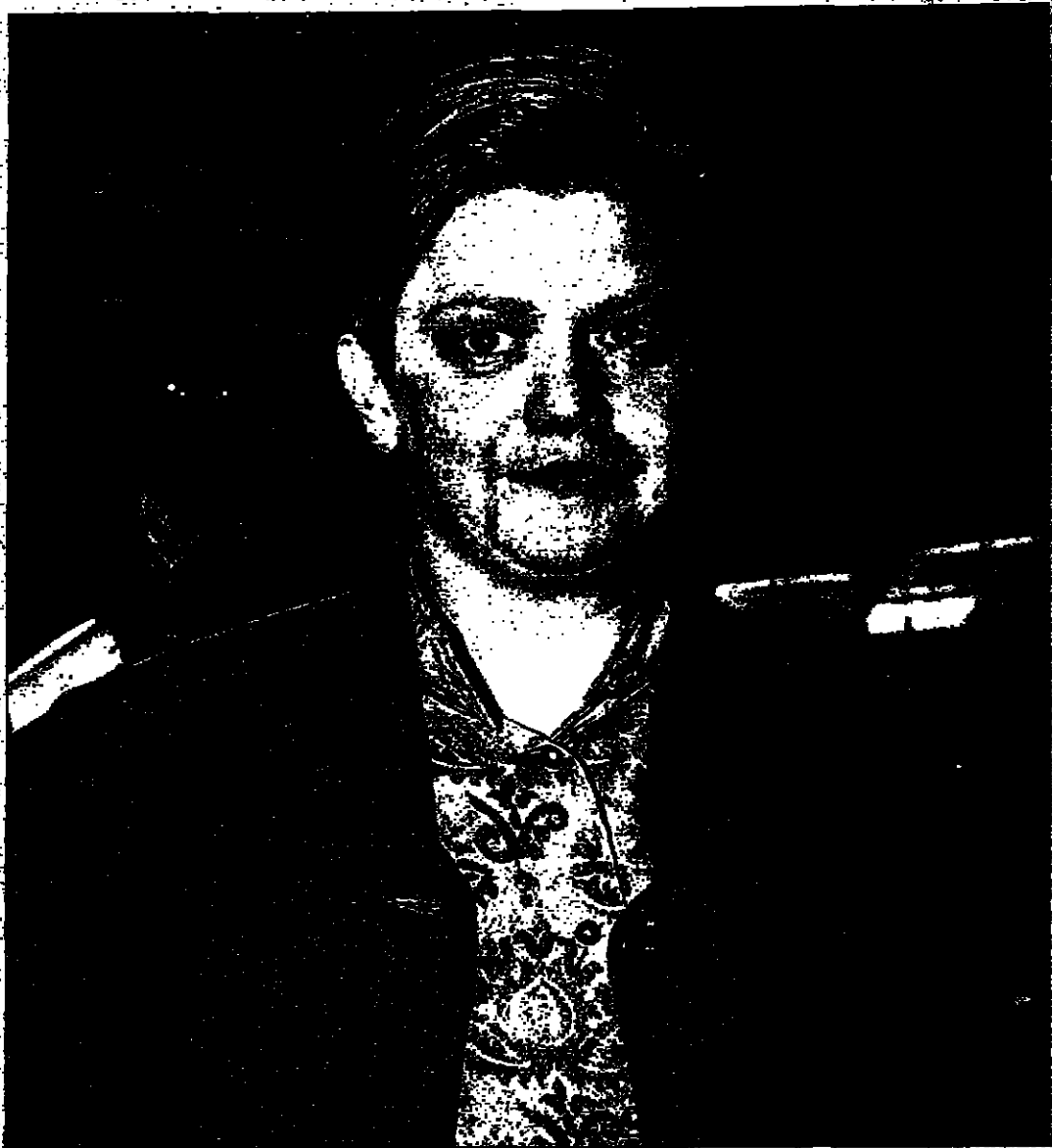
Sleepy Kids, the children's cartoon and merchandising group which owns the rights to the Duchess of York's Budgie the Little Helicopter brand, has run into financial turbulence. The company announced a net profit of £292,000 for the 14 months to December - down from £890,000 in the previous year. Martin Powell, chairman of Sleepy Kids, said a delay in completing a deal to distribute Budgie videos in the United States was to blame. He had hoped the agreement would have been signed last September, but it was delayed until January. The group is currently in dispute with its US agent over commissions.

Chris Hughes

Silcott wins legal aid to sue police

Winston Silcott, whose conviction for the murder of Constable Keith Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm riots in 1985 was overturned by the Court of Appeal, has regained the right to legal aid to sue the Metropolitan Police over its inquiry into the killing. Silcott, 37, who is currently serving a life sentence for the murder of boxer Anthony Smith, had legal aid withdrawn last November, but it was reinstated following an appeal by a Legal Aid Area Committee.

people



Saxophonist Jo Wells who was unable to resume playing after the 1989 riverboat disaster

Damages for musician whose career perished in disaster

A professional musician whose career with top pop bands was wrecked by the Marchioness riverboat disaster yesterday accepted £150,000 damages.

Jo Wells, 38, was at the party on board the pleasure cruiser when it collided with the sand dredger the *Bowbelle* in August 1989 killing 51 people.

The High Court in London heard how she had toured the world with pop groups Tears for Fears and the Communards before the accident. Pete Townshend, of The Who, described her as "exceptional" and said she was "certainly the best soprano saxophonist I have ever heard in pop".

But after the accident in which she almost drowned, she suffered severe depression and had not been able to resume her music, it was claimed. Instead of earning an estimated £40,000 a year or more if she had gone on to a successful solo career, she had been reduced to working as a cleaner.

The owners of the *Bowbelle* and the *Marchioness* admitted liability but there was a dispute about the amount of damages. They initially claimed she had been burnt out before the accident and would have been unlikely to have further success. They also questioned what she had actually earned at the time, pointing to a lack of documentary evidence to prove it.

But at a resumed hearing in the High Court in Preston yesterday, Mr Justice Kay approved an agreed settlement of £150,000 damages plus costs.

The earlier hearing had heard how Wells, of Greater Manchester, had been recruited to the prestigious Cheltenham Music School in Gloucestershire. She beat 10,000 other young musicians to win a scholarship to the Royal College of Music, London, with her then instrument, the clarinet. But she had her studies to launch a pop career with the band Kiss in the Pink, before enjoying significant success with Tears for Fears and the Communards.

Michael Redfern QC, her counsel, said she had developed post-traumatic stress disorder which affected her concentration after the accident in which her cousin died.

She had begun and then dropped out of a university course and binged on bottles of Scotch as she tried to come to terms with the tragedy. Ms Wells said she drank "to numb the feelings and sense of loss".

A jury at a coroner's court in 1995 decided the 51 victims had been "unlawfully killed" when the *Bowbelle* struck the stern of the *Marchioness* near Southwark Bridge on 20 August 1989. The pleasure boat's upper deck was ripped away, killing many people who were on the dance floor downstairs when the collision happened. Survivors and relatives of victims claimed that those responsible for the disaster should face manslaughter charges for a "hit and run accident" in which the *Bowbelle* broke maritime rules. But the Crown Prosecution Service decided last year that no criminal charges would be brought.

Louise Jury

Hero yachtsman joins ocean racing elite

The solo yachtsman Pete Goss, who gave up his own chance of sporting victory to save another sailor's life was awarded a special trophy for his achievements yesterday.

Goss, 35, was honoured with the Royal Ocean Racing Club's Trophy for Outstanding Seamanship for rescuing Frenchman Raphael Dinelli in mountainous seas in the Southern Ocean in December during the Vendée Globe round-the-world race. Only six other people have been given the honour since it was set up in 1981.

He received the award in London from Terry Robinson, the racing club's commodore, who praised Goss's "courageous determination" in the face of a terrifying situation.

The actress Joanna Lumley presented him with a bouquet bearing the message: "Flowers for a hero, love and congratulations."

The Cornishman is also to receive France's most celebrated award for bravery, the Legion d'Honneur.



Goss, a former Royal Marine who is married with three children, went on to finish the race in a new British record of 140 days despite the detour which cost him his chance of winning the 24,000-mile race. He said the award was "particularly special because it comes from people who know exactly what I have been through".

He said he had been amazed since his return by the number of people who had asked whether he regretted his actions. "It's a question that never even crossed my mind. Sailors live by unspoken rules which they learn very early on. When you talk about the life of a sailor at stake, everything else is forgotten."

Louise Jury

Mountain adventure on the Net

What next for an explorer who has viewed with amazement the world laid out before him from the summit of Everest? A: Show the rest of the world what it looks like.

The veteran mountaineer, Sir Chris Bonington, will embark on another high altitude odyssey next week when he leaves for the foothills of an unexplored Tibetan mountain.

However, this time the public will not have to rely merely on newspaper reports and photographs to follow the adventurer's climb for he is carrying with him a digital camera and satellite phone to transmit photographs around the world via the Internet in minutes.

The 62-year-old climber has been waiting for 12 years to gain permission from the Chinese authorities to enter the Nyalin-Quan-Tangla mountain range. His seven-man team leaves next week and aims to reach the summit of a 6,950

metre peak named Sepu Kangri, as yet unclimbed by Europeans, by the middle of May.

"I am very excited about this project. We can send back both text and actual images and we can update the website daily, so that anyone in the world can join our climb," Bonington said yesterday. "But it does have a slightly evangelical level to it, because people tend to get more excited about the fastest journeys and the biggest mountains, which is going away from what I think is the romantic tradition of mountaineering and exploration of going into unknown places."

"Using this technology I hope we can show the ordinary person in the street what a wonderful unknown world we still have, and how good it is to go into it."

From 18 April images and text from the expedition will be available on website <http://www.bonington.com>.

Matthew Brace

briefing

MEDICINE

Vaccine hope for fighting heart disease

A vaccine has been developed to block the transformation of "good" cholesterol into the "bad" version that leads to heart disease, it was reported today.

The vaccine has been shown to reduce fatty deposits on artery walls in rabbits, and if it proves equally effective in humans it could provide a safer and cheaper way of fighting heart disease than conventional cholesterol-lowering drugs.

Cholesterol travels in the bloodstream in compounds called high-density lipoproteins (HDL) or low-density and very-low-density lipoproteins (LDL and VLDL). HDL carries cholesterol molecules away from body tissues for disposal and is associated with a low risk of heart disease. But LDL and VLDL, which carry cholesterol to the body tissues, can form fatty deposits along the artery walls, leading to blockages and heart attacks. The research has focused on neutralising an enzyme that converts HDL cholesterol to LDL and VLDL.

The research, reported in *New Scientist* magazine, is being carried out by T Cell Sciences, a biotechnology company in Needham, Massachusetts, USA.

CUSTOMER CARE

Car dealers selling drivers short

Drivers are receiving a poor standard of service from franchised dealers, according to a survey disclosed today.

They are also far from happy with the quality of European-made cars and it is mainly Japanese models that top a satisfaction table. Coventry-based Jaguar, however, did make it into the top 10 of the table and was also rated as the company which had improved most since last year.

The findings came in the UK Customer Satisfaction Study conducted annually by car consumer experts JD Power, in association with EBC's *Top Gear* programme.

From information provided by more than 16,400 owners and drivers of M-registration cars, the survey found that motorists were most happy with Japanese car company Subaru. Second equal most satisfying makes of car were Honda of Japan and Kia of Korea. Jaguar was in eighth place and the only other European manufacturer in the top 10 was Germany's BMW, which was 10th equal. A spokesman for JD Power said: "It is clear from these findings that a segment of the motor trade is not keeping pace with the levels of customer service that the public has come to expect."

TRAVEL

Manchester airport loses altitude

Manchester has been overtaken by Singapore's Changi as the favourite airport for long-haul passengers, the International Air Transport Association said yesterday. Changi's ultra-modern terminal ousted Manchester, which is undergoing major reconstruction, from the top spot it held last year in a poll based on the views of some 35,000 people and covering 54 airports. IATA said Manchester's strong position despite building work could reflect the attitude of the airport's staff who came top of a separate section of the survey for courtesy and friendliness to travellers. Athens, bottom of the poll last year and for years target of fierce criticism from the travel trade, was voted the most improved airport. Gatwick, which came 12th in the overall ratings, came top for special services for overseas visitors second for staff courtesy, and second equal for efficiency of check-in.

High flyers

Top airports in the world according to passengers' views:

- 1. Singapore
- 2. London
- 3. Frankfurt
- 4. Amsterdam
- 5. Zurich
- 6. Heathrow
- 7. Osaka
- 8. Munich
- 9. Sydney
- 10. Calgary

INDUSTRY

Bosses sacrificing their holidays

More than one in three company finance directors do not take all their holidays - even though they believe workers are more effective if they use their full entitlement, a new survey shows today. Out of 200 finance chiefs questioned, 37 per cent said they never took their full entitlement, often blaming pressure of work. Yet almost all those polled by recruitment firm Reed Accountancy Personnel said staff should take all their holidays to be effective at work. Respondents said they expected employees to have a private life and "recharge their batteries", but many said that despite plans to take their own full entitlement of days off, they never did.

HEALTH

Brain damage found in ecstasy user

Doctors have described how a 26-year-old woman suffered brain damage and had her memory blotted out after taking just half an ecstasy tablet.

Dr Josef Spatt of Vienna's Ludwig Boltzmann Institute for Epilepsy and Neuromuscular Disease said she had a seizure three days after taking the drug and later showed "regressive infantile behaviour and fear". She recovered, but was plagued by memory problems which eventually led to her being admitted to Dr Spatt's clinic. After nine months there was only slight improvement in her memory. Writing in the *Journal of Neurology, Neurosurgery and Psychiatry*, Dr Spatt said brain scans showed lesions in an area of the brain essential for episodic memory function and known to be where ecstasy causes damage in experiments with laboratory animals.

BUSINESS

Managers lead by example on pay

Pay rises for company managers averaged 3.4 per cent over the past year, reflecting a "remarkable" period of wage stability, according to a new report by the Reward Group research organisation. It said the recent period of pay stability was remarkable compared with the volatility of increases in 1991-92. The biggest pay rises were in Hertfordshire and Essex (4.3 per cent), London (3.7 per cent) and the North-west (3.6 per cent). Lowest were in the South-west and north-east Midlands (3 per cent) and Yorkshire and the North-east (3.2 per cent).

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مكتبة من الأصول

The sun is changing the way we live

Arctic ozone layer at record low in March

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

If you spent the Easter break basking in the unexpected March sunshine, you may pay for it later in life with skin cancer. The ozone layer above the Arctic fell to a record low near the end of the month, according to new satellite data released yesterday by the US space agency Nasa.

The ozone layer, which protects us from potentially harmful ultraviolet sunlight, was 40 per cent thinner last month than the average between 1979 and 1982. Though not a "hole", this continues a downward trend: last year, the March level was 24 per cent down on the 1979-1982 levels.

The risks of enjoying sunny weather are much greater in Britain early in the year compared with summer. The ozone layer always thins in March - meaning that unprotected sunbathing in spring can be more hazardous in the long term.

Last November, an expert panel of scientists told the Government that 8,000 extra skin cancer cases would be caused in Britain by increased UV exposure. At present, there are 80,000 cases annually in this country.

The report said children today will face a lifetime risk of skin cancer which is 4-10 per cent higher because of ozone damage. The increase in ultraviolet light is also expected to affect crops and animals, plankton in the sea, and synthetic materials, although it is not yet possible to gauge the damage.

Worldwide, the average ozone layer has a thickness of 300 "Dobson units" - about equal to two stacked 1p pieces. In March, the Arctic level fell to 219 Dobson units. In the Antarctic, the ozone "hole" measures about 100 Dobson units.

"Some people have got the message that the sun can be dangerous," said Kate Law,

head of clinical programs at the Cancer Research Campaign. "But a good proportion only take protection when they're abroad because they think that's where the danger is. A recent survey found that one in 12 people here insisted that the sun doesn't cause cancer - so there's still some work to do."

The most important precaution to take is to make sure that children are well-protected from the sun, she said. Studies have shown that high exposure to ultraviolet light when young gives a predisposition to skin cancer later in life.

"I was in Regent's Park today with a TV crew talking to people. The problem is that they don't like being lectured, though it was nice to see that the children were properly covered up, wearing baseball caps, long shorts and long-sleeved shirts, even if their parents weren't."

Britain has accused the United States of dragging its feet on implementing steps to reduce the greenhouse emissions that are blamed for climate change and global warming, writes David Osborne in New York.

John Gummer, the Secretary of State for the Environment, shocked UN delegates by visibly fuming at the close of a speech delivered on behalf of the US government by America's ambassador to the UN, Bill Richardson.

Mr Richardson later told British officials he had been "yelled at" by Mr Gummer, who was seated next to him.

In his own speech Mr Gummer said: "The US has the capability to deal with the serious disruptions that climate change will bring, but the rest of the world does not."

"In 25 years' time, when countries are facing starvation or inundation, who is going to pick up the tab? ... The sadness in America is that politicians have not been willing to communicate to their public what is at stake here."



Raw facts: Bare shoulders are in vogue for this Chanel model (left) as they were for bathers back in 1913. Future generations may have to cover up



Photographs: Ben Elwes

Fashion learns Victorian lesson about a fair skin

Melanie Hickey

Wearing shorts, swim-suits and bikinis in the sun could soon become a thing of the past as the ozone layer continues to deplete. Judging by the burnt faces affected by the early April sun, UV rays have, as predicted, become more potent.

For those worried about skin cancer statistics, Arabic robes could become the beachwear of choice by 2010.

In 1995, the most popular sun cream sold at Boots was SPF 8. In 1996 it had nearly doubled to SPF 15.

"We told customers never to use anything below SPF 15 and it has worked," said a Boots spokeswoman. The company has even produced an SPF 50 mole stick, for those worried that their freckles and moles may become malignant.

The world of high fashion blissfully ignores scares such as these. Gianni Versace has a range of its-bitsy bikinis that

leave little to the imagination, as does Calvin Klein, Chanel, and every big designer under the sun.

At Harvey Nichols, Temagin Thompson, the beachwear buyer, makes no bones about her its-bitsy stock: "Sorry, but I do buy purely from an aesthetic angle. Bikinis are really strong this year, especially in sporty and asymmetric styles, but we do recommend that older women opt for styles that cover up their cleavage and neck areas, as

the skin there ages quickly". There are some companies, however, which are providing safe clothing. Husband and wife team Tim and Jenny Holway have created a range of clothes called Sun Smart, all of which have an SPF of 50.

Their clothes, beach umbrellas and sunglasses are recommended by the Health Education Authority. Adult-sized T-shirts and baseball caps with UV monitors from the company Creative

Expressions are also available. When these garments are exposed to sunlight, their designs become increasingly visible. It is only a matter of time before further collections of sun-proof clothing are available in this country, as they have been for years in Australia.

Most super-models, including Kate Moss, have a slight tan, proving that women do still want a slightly sun-kissed look. But the deep tan is now seen as ugly and unhealthy.

The fashion debate about sun protection boils down to simple facts. The fashion designers will continue to expose flesh, as long as it is safe to walk out of doors, so it is up to consumers to protect themselves. As long as the body is covered in at least SPF 15 and a hat there's no point in worrying too much. Adequate protection is easy with the vast range on offer from cosmetics companies. So wear what you want, within reason, before it's too late.

The architect's historic search for a blueprint to keep light at bay

Jonathan Glancey

"Architecture", wrote Le Corbusier, the 20th century's greatest architect, "is the masterly, correct and magnificent play of masses brought together in light."

Today, architects spend an increasing amount of their time trying to keep light at bay. To be fair, the sun has always been both friend and foe, and architects since the earliest civilisations have been encouraged to mollify its intensity. In fact, it has only been relatively recently that they have allowed the sun to wear its way into every room.

For centuries, various designs and combinations of thick walls, deep eaves, shutters, bris-

es-soleil, verandahs and arcades have been employed to keep us cool. No one knew about the link between the sun's rays and skin cancer until very recently, but no one wanted to be dazzled or fried by the midday sun. Except, of course, the English, who for decades have been resistant to any form of sunshading for buildings or streets.

Over the past decade, however, sunscreens have begun to appear on new offices (such as those at Stockley Park, the United States-style business park near Heathrow airport), schools and major public buildings such as the British Library. As well as keeping the sun at bay, both inside and around

the edges of buildings, these also help to decrease the energy needed to cool them.

On the whole, we are safe from the sun indoors and only in danger out of doors. Even so, it is still rare to see arcades, which allow us to walk in driving rain or scorching sun without being enclosed just as our predecessors did when out strolling along John Nash's original Regent Street in London or as lucky shoppers still do at the Pantiles in Tunbridge Wells, for example.

Techniques for keeping cool and safe from the sun are well known, tried, tested and as old as ancient Greece. It really is time to adopt them now and at precious little extra cost. Any

overtly technological solution is in danger of using energy, generating heat and contributing to the problem of global warming. But there are ways to protect us and save on energy.

Some of the latest international stadiums, for example, feature deep canopies designed to keep the sun out of spectators' eyes at all times of the day while generating up to 40 per cent of the electricity needed to run them through solar panels.

The problem at the moment is not so much a lack of ideas or technologies, old and new, but the fact that there are no guidelines, much less legislation, to ensure that buildings help to keep us safe from the worst effects of the unmitigated sun.

Cancer experts split over roads risk to children

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

Cancer experts were divided last night over a new report which says that living near industrial sites or motorways could put children at increased risk of developing cancer.

A new study published today claims that children living near sources of atmospheric pollution, such as steel works or oil refineries, are 20 per cent more likely to die of leukaemia or other childhood cancers. It adds that there is also a "significant excess" of cases involving children who lived near motorways and railways.

But cancer charities and leading experts - including Sir Richard Doll who heads the current national study on childhood cancer (UKCCS) - dismissed the findings of Professor George Knox's study, saying that it made "no sense in a biological way or a methodological way."

Professor Knox's study, which appears in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health*, looked at more than 22,000 children who died of cancer up to the age of 15 between 1953 and 1980. His team noted

new study finds excess deaths from living near pollution source

cancer rates in children by post code and then drew a map showing locations of power plants, refineries and factories.

They found a tendency for cancer cases near furnaces, refineries, car and battery factories, crematoria and power stations - although, with a few exceptions, nuclear power plants did not appear dangerous.

Near motorways and railways there were between 15 and 20 per cent more cases of cancer than would normally be expected, the professor said.

The authors concluded that childhood cancers were geographically associated with two main types of industrial pollution: volatile gases from petroleum and smoke and gas from kilns, furnaces and car engines. The study takes no account of other possible causes such as diet or cancer-carrying genes.

"If geographical clustering is genuine and not a demographic artefact, as is now clear, then it must reflect the existence of localised environmental haz-

ards," Professor Knox wrote. "For a comprehensive single explanation we must favour direct exposure of pregnant women or young children to airborne substances diffusing into the surrounding environment."

He said industry could not eliminate all pollutants altogether, but once identified specific ones could be reduced and mothers could be warned against certain occupations.

But Sir Richard Doll said that Professor Knox's study was "hypothesis-forming but not conclusive" and he did not find the argument "compelling".

"It is an extremely complex methodology and he has not got a control study ... There is no obvious connection between industrial sites and cancer."

He said UKCCS would look at some of the hypotheses, of which the priority would be to look at whether living near main roads had significant results.

Professor Gordon McVie, director of the Cancer Research Campaign said he was

"not greatly moved" by the study. "There is nothing particularly new in this. It is quite provocative in some ways ... but it doesn't all hang together."

He questioned the finding on motorways saying it was hard to believe that roads where cars pass quickly would bring about cancer clusters whereas those where cars emit more fumes from traffic jams would not.

Professor Ray Cartwright, head of Leukaemia Research Fund's department of clinical epidemiology and of the UKCCS epidemiologists, attacked the study for its methodology. "It uses postcode areas but we do not know how many people that covers ... We cannot accept this study as it is. You need to take individual people and look at their individual experiences."

Replying to the criticisms last night, Professor Knox said that his research was important and could now be used as a starting point to see if there was a better way of discovering the reasons for childhood cancer clusters: "It does make sense and it is the best methodology there is at the moment ... You can't throw away the facts because you don't like the theory."

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"shopping mad" about outrageous bank penalty fees in the 'Sunlight' fundrette last week...



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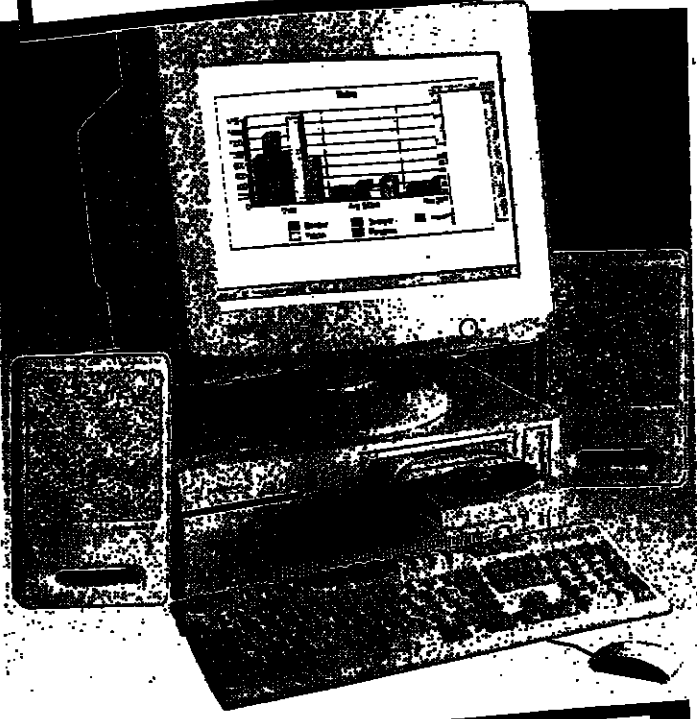


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Family ties: Doubts cast on stereotypes about modern, caring fathers and their rebellious offspring

Children yearn for more time with dads

Glenda Cooper
Social Affairs Correspondent

The idea of the New Dad is more myth than reality, it was claimed yesterday. A survey has shown fathers are remaining distant from their children, although their kids want more attention.

The report, which questioned 1,000 children between eight and 15, found that one in five could not recall sharing an activity with their fathers during the previous week.

But, said the survey commissioned by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, nearly 80 per cent wanted their dads to spend more time with them, 2 per cent more than wanted time with their mothers.

Most children were taking part in some family-based activity at least once a week, such as watching television as a family, or visited relatives. Only half said that they played with members of their family once a week, such as kicking around a football or playing board games.

But when they were asked about activities undertaken with specific members of the family, children reported doing far fewer things with

their father. More than six out of 10 had done jobs around the house or garden with their mothers, compared with 37 per cent with their fathers.

Half did homework or reading with mums, with only 34 per cent turning to their dads. The only activity where dads scored more was in trips to the cinema or football matches. When it came to no activities at all, 19 per cent said they had done nothing with their fathers, more than twice the number which said that about their mothers.

Activities tended to follow traditional domestic lines, with girls helping mum in the home and boys going out with dad.

And children's perceptions of their parents' role fell along stereotypical lines too. A significant majority of children questioned thought their mum's place was in the kitchen while their dad's was in the garage, mending electrical items.

Children did not lack hugs and kisses from their parents, although girls were more likely to receive physical affection than boys. Mothers were approached more than fathers when advice was needed.

Of all eight to 11-year-olds surveyed, almost 90 per cent would con-



Tenderness: Nineties dads may be more affectionate than they used to be, but many children still have little to do with their fathers

side in their mothers, while only 60 per cent would talk to their fathers.

And nearly three times as many 12- to 15-year-olds questioned would talk to their mothers rather than their fathers about health and puberty.

The family unit generally remained strong said the NSPCC with nearly three quarters of children living with both natural parents.

But for the 16 per cent who were in a single parent family, a third said that they never saw the absent parent, which in nine times out of 10 was their father.

Jim Harding, director of the charity, said: "This survey presents a reassuring picture of childhood, with most children enjoying close and loving relationships with both their parents."

"But even in the 1990s, some fathers appear to be remote figures. We cannot say whether this is a result of heavy workloads or other factors. But what is clear from the survey is that most of the children did want their dads to spend time with them."

Leading article, page 19

School's in, says Britain's new generation of swots

Glenda Cooper

Rebellious, disrespectful and disruptive? Not at all. Britain's youth are far more likely to be serious and studious, according to the Talking About My Generation survey.

Doing well in examinations was the most important thing amongst nine out of 10 children - more so than pleasing their parents, looking good or winning a competition.

That certainly seemed to be the case yesterday at South Camden Community School, a comprehensive school for 800 pupils in north London, where pupils aged between 12 and 16 insisted that exams were the most important things in their lives.

Esther Apato-Dumelo said: "GCSEs and A levels can make people freak out but you can't go to college or get that good a job without education."

She was heartily endorsed by her fellow pupils, who said they did not even mind having exams before the all-important GCSEs, so that they could get used to the examination process. "If you only do exams once, you don't have enough experience," said Noras Al-Rammani. "And your parents can help you in doing these sorts of things."

"You're going to have pressure on you the rest of your life,"

Esther added. "So this is a good way of getting used to it."

Only John Agbe dissented: "I don't know whether the best way of seeing how good someone is by sitting down writing things on a stupid bit of paper."

While school posed few worries for them, the teenagers said they worried about increasing violence on the streets.

In the report, one in five children aged eight to 11 worry so much that they can be de-

scribed as "anxious", with girls suffering most.

"It's not so much now but in the winter when it's seven or eight o'clock and dark, it gets scary if you are walking around alone," said Tooba Ahmadi.

"You feel there are so many crimes and you don't know what is going to happen," she said.

"Boys are scared as well as girls," said Esther. "They can get beaten up as well."

But the boys and girls also said that teenagers were unfairly seen as being violent and badly behaved.

"If my brother walks down the street, old ladies think that he is going to mug them and hold their bags tighter. It is just people reacting to stereotypes," Esther said.

"Older people say all sorts of bad things about you if you are a teenager," said Tooba. "When you are going on the buses old

people don't trust you just because you might be one of those people."

As for restrictions, the survey found that children respect the views of their parents, and less than 25 per cent think they ought to be the ones to decide what time to come home. However, the South Camden pupils felt that they knew how to live their lives sensibly.

"You can't make a teenager do what they don't want to,"

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Food poisoning outbreak claims over 50 victims

The number of cases in an outbreak of salmonella linked to a Scottish hotel rose to more than 50 last night.

According to a spokesman for Tayside Health Board, 13 people have now been confirmed as suffering from the bacteria, and there are a further 41 suspected cases.

Tayside Health Board said there were four people in hospital last night, all making satisfactory progress. Of the confirmed cases, eight men, three women and two children are ill.

The announcement followed a meeting of the outbreak control team, formed after the infection came to light at the Isle of Skye Hotel in Perth.

The hotel's owners, Bess Taylors, said the source of the outbreak remained a mystery. The hotel's kitchens have been cleaned twice and the restaurant has remained closed since the individuals fell ill.

A spokesman for the health board said: "The public health department is liaising with colleagues throughout the country to ensure any suspected cases are identified and investigated."

"Environmental health officers are engaged in tracing the food histories of the people affected to try and identify any common source."

People involved came from as far afield as Easter Ross in the Highlands and England, making this a "complex task."

The spokesman said two of

the victims were being treated in Perth Royal Infirmary and the other two at Kings Cross Hospital, in Dundee.

Labour yesterday demanded that Scottish Secretary Michael Forsyth give evidence at the fatal accident inquiry into the deaths of victims of the *E.coli* food poisoning outbreak in central Scotland.

Shadow Scottish Secretary George Robertson said Mr Forsyth and health minister Lord James Douglas-Hamilton would have to give a "full and frank account" of their role in handling the crisis.

Labour resumed its onslaught on the Government following Tuesday's publication of the Pennington report into the outbreak, which claimed 18 lives in the Lanarkshire and Forth Valley health board areas.

Mr Robertson said the ministers' appearance at the inquiry was the only way to restore public confidence in food safety, which began in November.

"The Pennington report catalogues the hands-off, slackly regulated, profit-first attitude to food safety which has been the hallmark of this Government," he said.

"This report could not, because of legal constraints, address some of the outstanding questions on the whole *E.coli* tragedy. The role of ministers in the early handling of these events is still shrouded in sinister mystery."

He claimed the Scottish Office issued a Food Hazard Warning on 27 November with a list of affected outlets but restricted its distribution to environmental health departments with instructions that it should not be released to the public.

"The buck stops with the Secretary of State and the Minister for State and we have a right to know if they will testify under oath," he said.

The Scottish Conservatives refused to comment on Mr Robertson's demand, claiming it was a governmental matter.

Meanwhile, a Scottish Office spokesman said it was up to the sheriff in charge of the fatal accident inquiry to decide who is called to give evidence.



New term: Pupils returning to the Yorkshire Martyrs Collegiate School, Bradford, yesterday. Photograph: Steve Forrest/Guzzell

Teachers poised to shut out gun boys

Teachers at a school where two boys were excluded after being caught with an airgun last night voted to ballot on refusing to teach the pupils if they returned, writes Lucy Ward.

Their threat came after an independent appeals panel overturned a decision by the head and governors at Yorkshire Martyrs Collegiate School, Bradford, in West Yorkshire, to expel the two 14-year-olds.

Last night, talks were continuing between the Roman Catholic school, Bradford Council and the boys' parents to try to resolve the issue without a dispute.

Brian Garvey, Yorkshire representative of the National Association of Schoolmasters/Union of Women Teachers - the main union at the school - said that refusing to teach the youngsters was the only course of action open to his members if the boys returned.

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'Smart' bullets to be a sure-fire hit

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

They first appeared in cartoons, but "smart bullets" - which follow their target after being fired - may soon become reality. US military experts have realised that it is possible to build a bullet which can alter its direction during flight by twitching its nose.

The bullets are known as BLAMS - Barrel Launched Adaptive Munitions - and are guided by a laser beam.

Initially the aim is to produce large shells for fighter planes which can follow the twists and turns of an enemy aircraft in a dogfight. But ultimately miniaturisation could make it possible to have hand-held weapons with smart bullets.

Though the individual bullets

would be at least five times more expensive than standard ones, they would allow snipers to hit targets several kilometres away with deadly accuracy.

The US Air Force project to build BLAMs has recently been declassified by the US Department of Defense. Ron Barrett, an aerospace engineer at Auburn University, Alabama, told *New Scientist* magazine: "This technology could change the nature of war."

Each bullet has a swivelling nose that is made to "twitch" by miniature piezoelectric rods, which change length when a voltage is applied to them.

They would be guided by "painting" the target with a laser or microwave beam. Each round would have a sensor that homes in on this signal, just as a smart bomb does.

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news

Eye witness captures the heroic age of exploration



A series of paintings by George Marston recording Sir Ernest Shackleton's epic Imperial Trans-Antarctic Expedition of 1914-17, are in Christie's travel auction today. His ship, *Endurance*, was crushed in ice in the Weddell Sea (above, est. £15,000-20,000). Also in the sale is a cotton bag with a sprig of artificial holly (est. £1,000-1,500) that Shackleton (left) produced at Christmas festivities shared with Captain Scott (right) in the Antarctic in 1902.

Number of new physics teachers set to plummet

Judith Judd
Education Editor

Applications for teacher training in both physics and mathematics have plummeted, raising fears of a serious shortage in the subjects in secondary schools. Applications for one-year postgraduate physics teacher-training courses have fallen by more than half - down to 181 from 440 at the same time two years ago. So far this year there have been just 95 acceptances for physics, according to figures from teacher-training departments and colleges.

Trainers blame the drop mainly on decreasing numbers of mature applicants. During the recession, both maths and science courses have relied on older graduates made redundant from jobs in industry and the City. Physics, in particular, has had a steady stream of applicants from engineering companies which have laid off employees. The improvement in the economy has ended the queue of unemployed physicists looking for a career change. Applications for the two sub-

jects have fallen for the last three years, but the drop is particularly alarming this year. In maths they are down from 1,001 at this time last year to 742. Universities and colleges need to recruit 1,700 students to fill all their departmental places. Maths graduates, say teacher trainers, are very much in demand as the economy improves. And teachers' salaries compared with those of other professions have fallen.

There is no separate target for physics but the overall target for science is 2,707. So far there are just over 900 acceptances for all such courses. Applications and acceptances are down for chemistry, and also for biology.

Although some of the shortfall will be made up as students' other options fall through, experience suggests that about 20 per cent of maths places will be unfilled. In science, the shortfall may be less but only because the Government has reduced the target for science places.

Mary Russell, secretary of the Universities Council for the Education of Teachers, said: "The situation in science is getting pretty desperate. We should expect to have many more applications by this stage. 'Whenever a recession ends, science and maths are the first areas to feel the effects. Graduates decide they won't go into

teaching because other things are better paid and less hassle." Professor Alan Smithers, of Brunel University's Centre for Education and Employment Research, said that the difficulty in attracting physics teachers was part of the wider problem of recruiting enough people to physics degree courses.

Teaching was often a second-choice career for physicists, he suggested, and should be made more attractive. Government bursaries in science subjects had not really succeeded in attracting more applicants.

He proposed regular sabbaticals in university science departments. "The real joy of science is being at the frontier of your subject. Someone honed up to a high level of understanding of physics finds they are continually giving out in teaching and becoming further and further away from their subject."

Another option would be for university science departments to include some teacher training in their four-year physics and chemistry courses. A spokeswoman for the Institute of Physics said: "We don't have enough enthusiastic physics teachers in the school system to persuade people to take up physics at A-level. Some schools have no specialist physics teacher."

Education+, The Tablet

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Coolest star sheds light on dark matter

Charles Arthur
Science Editor

British astronomers have discovered the faintest, coolest star ever, with a mass only 50 times greater than that of the planet Jupiter. Despite being so faint that it required special techniques to detect it, the "brown dwarf" could help to solve the enduring puzzle of the universe's dark matter.

The star is known as a brown dwarf because it is small and comparatively cool. According to observations, its surface temperature is 2,000C. By contrast, our sun has a surface temperature of 5,500C, and a mass 1,000 times greater than Jupiter.

Dubbed PLZ 1 by the team of astronomers from the University of Leicester which discovered it, the star lies in the Pleiades star cluster. Its low mass suggests it has never become hot enough to become a self-fueled star: the heat of the time when gravity pulled it together. The discovery was announced at this week's National Astronomy Meeting in Southampton.

Dark matter - which is impossible to detect by normal means - is believed to constitute more than 90 per cent of the total mass of the universe; the visible stars cannot explain the wider gravitational effects that astronomers observe. But theoreticians have argued over

whether the dark matter consists of planet-sized chunks of real matter, or could be comprised of subatomic particles such as neutrinos which would make up for their tiny individual mass by weight of numbers.

This discovery has implications for dark matter because low mass stars and objects could make up the unseen matter in the universe, said David Pinfield, one of the four-strong team which made the breakthrough. "It hasn't been clear before whether the form of dark matter goes all the way down to masses the size of Jupiter. Now we have shown that it does. Jupiter-sized objects would count as dark matter."

Further observations could help to establish the total mass of the Pleiades cluster, as the observed stars have in effect already been "weighed" by estimating their mass, based on their brightness.

After this year's stunning show from Hale-Bopp comet, November next year should see a spectacular meteor shower when the Earth passes through the dust grains of another comet. The result will produce bright streaks in the sky, with thousands of meteors per hour entering the Earth's atmosphere and burning up.

Though they will also be visible this November, next year is expected to bring a more impressive show.

Satellites at risk from solar flare

Charles Arthur

Telecommunications satellites and power lines could be knocked off by a solar flare thrown off from the Sun on Monday, scientists said yesterday. But it could bring benefits to Scottish observers in the form of enhanced "Northern Lights", also known as the *aurora borealis*.

The flare, consisting of electrons and charged ions of elements from hydrogen to iron, was thrown off the Sun's surface in "a high energy event" known as a coronal mass ejection. "When it gets to the Earth, the first effects will be seen by spacecraft and satellites," said Andrew Coates, of the Mullard Space Science Laboratories.

The charged particles induce currents in metal objects. The last time this occurred, in January, the Teistar 401 satellite failed. Power lines also suffer from the induced currents, which can blow supplies. In 1991, a Quebec power company was seriously affected by power

surges caused by a solar storm. Scientists were unsure yesterday afternoon exactly when the particles from the ejection will arrive in the Earth's magnetic field. It was detected by the Solar and Heliospheric Observatory, a satellite that NASA and the European Space Agency launched in 1995 to keep a constant eye on the Sun's surface.

Dr Coates said: "We'll get about an hour's warning from one of our observation satellites. The Earth's magnetic field is going to take a battering. In January, the number of electrons in the atmosphere went up by a factor of 10,000. It was just after the peak that Teistar failed."

However, the same particles will also make the *aurora borealis* visible further south than normal. "It should be visible in Scotland, and maybe even lower down."

The real danger is to satellites which are in geostationary orbit - predominantly TV and communications. "They are in the firing line," said Dr Coates.

تمكنا من الأصل



Fore! A golfer on the Old Course at St Andrews, Fife – home to the game's ruling body – seen from the Old Course Hotel where managers are seeking to protect guests whose tranquil tea in the conservatory is regularly interrupted by wayward shots from the 17th hole which shatter the glass. Photograph: Colin McPherson

Five arrested after stake-out in hunt for Guerin killer

Five people were being questioned by police last night in the latest stage of their investigation into last year's murder in Dublin of the Irish investigative crime journalist Veronica Guerin.

Two of the five, a man in his fifties and a woman, were held after they left a ferry from Holyhead, Anglesey, when it docked at Dun Laoghaire, Co Dublin, yesterday morning.

The move was understood to have followed a stake-out operation by detectives at Irish airport and ferry terminals.

Three other men were held later in other parts of the Irish capital. All of the arrests were made under legislation permitting suspects to be held in custody for up to 48 hours before being either charged or released.

The man held on the ferry had been sought by police for questioning since leaving Ireland for Britain at the end of last summer.

Police have questioned over 100 people since Ms Guerin was shot dead at the wheel of her car in Dublin last June.

The on-going investigation has also produced scores of underworld guns and



Guerin: Murdered at wheel of car

other weapons, and led to prosecutions not directly linked to the killing of the journalist.

So far, one person – a Dublin man – has been accused of the Guerin murder.

The shooting prompted widespread outrage in the Irish Republic and led the Dublin parliament to introduce a series of anti-crime measures – including the right to seize the assets of known criminals.

Interpol's top target wins delay in £100m drug trial

Kim Sengupta

The trial in the Netherlands of a Briton accused of running Europe's biggest drugs ring was halted yesterday after claims that the evidence against him may have been contaminated.

The development in the case against 32-year-old Curtis Warren, codenamed Target One by Interpol and charged in connection with an alleged £100m cocaine smuggling plot, raised immediate questions over cross-border co-operation between European police and customs.

Han Jahue, for the defence, maintained that methods used by British investigators to gather information on Mr Warren, a businessman from Liverpool, rendered the prosecution null and void. He demanded the UK authorities reveal exactly how the evidence was obtained.

Mr Jahue told the central criminal court at The Hague that the use of phone taps, and the fact that British authorities would not divulge details of their informants, were contrary to Dutch procedure.

He maintained that information obtained in the UK which had been used to charge Mr Warren in Britain on a previous occasion should not be admitted. The only evidence admissible was that obtained by an independent Dutch investigation.

The presiding judge, Irene De Vries, adjourned the case until 5 June, and asked for four extra witnesses to be called, including two British customs officers, Nick Baker and Phil Byrne.

Mr Warren was acquitted in

1993 at Newcastle Crown Court on charges involving £250m worth of drugs hidden in ingots.

In October last year he was arrested by Dutch police near Rotterdam Europort. A raid on a ship in the dock led to the recovery of 800kg of Colombian cocaine, with a street value of £75m, secreted in aluminium ingots. Raids in Amsterdam and Rotterdam netted more drugs, bringing the total value to £100m, as well as a cache of hand grenades, automatic weapons, and CS gas canisters.

Dutch police had acted on information from Britain as part of a six-month operation, codenamed Crayfish, involving Dutch investigators, British customs, and officers from the North-West Regional Crime Squad.

Six other Britons were arrested and charged with Mr Warren. They include Stephen Mee, from Liverpool, who escaped from a prison van on the way to Manchester Crown Court in 1993 but was sentenced *in absentia* to 22 years in jail on charges of smuggling cocaine from Colombia.

Mr Mee, and another defendant, Ray Nolan, 28, from Liverpool, allegedly gave false names to the Dutch police. The other defendants are John Farrell, 34, from Manchester; Stephen Whitehead, also 34, from Oldham; William Fitzgerald, 55, and William Riley, 47, both from Liverpool.

Yesterday, after being remanded in custody until 5 June, Mr Warren said: "It is important that you investigate how the English got their information. Why did they need to claim public immunity?"

DAILY POEM

From 'Song of Myself'

By Walt Whitman

The spotted hawk swoops by and accuses me, he complains of my gab and my loitering.

I too am not a bit tamed, I too am untranslatable, I sound my barbaric yawp over the roofs of the world.

The last seed of day holds back for me, It flings my likeness after the rest and true as any on the shadow'd wilds, It coaxes me to the vapor and the dusk.

I depart as air, I shake my white locks at the runaway sun, I effuse my flesh in eddies, and drift in lacy jags.

I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love, If you want me again look for me under your boot-soles.

You will hardly know who I am or what I mean, But I shall be good health to you nevertheless, And filter and fibre your blood.

Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged, Missing me one place search another, I stop somewhere waiting for you.

Today's selection from the new Penguin Classics anthology of Nineteenth-Century American Poetry, edited by William C. Spengemann with Jessica F. Roberts (Penguin, £9.99), is the final part of the epic autobiographical poem at the centre of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*. First published in 1855, the collection would acquire many new poems as it went through nine editions before Whitman's death in 1892.

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THE INDEPENDENT election '97

Tories would make bribing MPs a crime

Frans Abrams
and Steve Boggan

The bribery of MPs could become a criminal offence if the Tories are returned to power, John Major said yesterday.

A change in the law following the cash-for-questions scandal would end more than 20 years of calls for a legal loophole to be closed. As long ago as 1976 a Royal Commission on standards in public life suggested that Parliament should consider making the corruption of bribery or attempted bribery of an MP an offence.

Yesterday the Prime Minister told journalists that the move, which was also recommended by Lord Nolan, should be looked at. "I will certainly examine the question of whether this should be a criminal offence."

A House Office policy paper last December suggested that the law should be changed. At present MPs are not covered by the laws on bribery in public bodies and must be disciplined by the House of Commons

rather than the courts.

The paper suggested that new legislation could make bribery of an MP an offence, but could allow a waiver whereby the House could decide to deal with a particular case itself if it wished.

Speaking in Plymouth last night, Tony Blair said behaviour like Mr Hamilton's would not be tolerated in his party.

"Like Martin Bell, I am willing to give Mr Hamilton the benefit of the doubt on the allegations as yet unproven," he said.

"But there are enough admitted wrongdoings to merit Mr Hamilton's stepping down. If a candidate of mine had taken the gifts and payments Mr Hamilton took, without declaring them, he would not be a Labour candidate."

"If a candidate of mine had lied to the Deputy Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary, he would not be a Labour candidate. These are admitted wrongdoings. They are serious. Yet he is still there," the Labour leader said.

At the Tory press conference

yesterday the deputy Prime Minister, Michael Heseltine, confirmed that he had given evidence to Sir Gordon Downey's inquiry into cash-for-questions.

Mr Heseltine said: "Neil Hamilton has made it absolutely clear that he has a full answer to the allegations put against him. I have given my evidence to Sir Gordon Downey and it is his job to evaluate it."

Mr Heseltine's evidence to the Scott Inquiry into the sale of arms to Iraq proved damaging to his fellow ministers because it emerged that he had refused to take advice from the Attorney General, Sir Nicholas Lyell, that he should sign a public interest immunity certificate which would prevent evidence from going before the courts.

John Major yesterday gave a personal vote of support to Mr Hamilton, whose constituency association backed his candidature on Tuesday night. He said that if he were voting in Tatton, Cheshire, he would vote for Mr Hamilton and the electors there should do the same.

Major takes on Mohican in Brecon

Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

A man with a red Mohican haircut supporting the Labour Party yesterday gave John Major his best day on the campaign trail. In glorious sunshine in south Wales, the Prime Minister stripped to his shirt sleeves to deliver an attack on Labour from the platform of his battle bus in the market square at Brecon.

With real feeling, Mr Major told the crowd of rival Tory, Labour and Liberal supporters that it felt good to "escape from that mad circle of opinion-bormers" in London.

At that point, the heckling began. "God help us if you are still there in government."

Mr Major retorted: "I will be in some times remember someone else with less exotic hair saying to me the same thing five years ago."

Mr Major then harangued Mr Blair and the Labour Party for threatening to bring higher taxation in spite of all their details. The man with the Mohican shouted "bollocks". The Prime Minister said: "That is the most intelligent remark I have heard from the Labour Party in this whole campaign."

The street theatre had a serious purpose. Mr Major was campaigning in one of the "super marginals" in South Wales which the Tories are desperate to hold. Brecon and Radnorshire was held by Jonathan Evans with a 130 majority at the last election and is being challenged by Labour and the Liberal Democrats.

Bell burns his BBC bridges to take on Tatton

Jojo Moyes

Martin Bell, the former war correspondent and prospective independent MP for Tatton, Cheshire, yesterday resigned from the BBC after 35 years to devote himself to his new political career.

Speaking at a press conference in a small theatre in Kautsford, also in Cheshire, hours before the Labour candidate he is replacing was due to formally stand down, Mr Bell said he had made his decision "with a bit of a sad heart".

"But," he added, "it became clear, especially now I'm in for the long haul, that I could not remain even theoretically or technically a BBC reporter."

"I'm not going back. I expect to be the next MP for this constituency so I have necessarily burnt my bridges behind me."

Tony Hall, the chief executive of BBC News who had previously refused the reporter's resignation in November, had taken it well, Mr Bell said, and "with a certain degree of relief".

The veteran reporter had requested that his "BBC swan song", a documentary on the United Nations, and a series of radio pieces entitled *The Truth is our Currency*, be broadcast as planned.

But Mr Bell revealed that he had, that morning, made a formal complaint to his former employer about the coverage of his campaign.

While he had been canvassing in Wilslow, the BBC had

chosen to broadcast footage of one person of the three who had opposed him, instead of the 25 who had offered their support. "I never thought I'd be in this situation," he joked. "I left the Beeb and already standards declined so fast?"

Mr Bell also revealed that he had a new political ally in the form of the former Manchester police chief John Stalker, famous for his anti-corruption stance, who had approached him yesterday to offer his support.

"He came in off the street this morning," Mr Bell said. "Mr Stalker was out for a walk on the heath and he called us."

"I'm very, very pleased as he's Mr Integrity and his endorsement carries some weight in these parts."

After the Conservative candidate Neil Hamilton's official resignation on Tuesday night, at least one local Conservative councillor resigned in protest at a vote some protested was "a whitewash".

They raised prospects of an independent Conservative candidate to stand against Mr Hamilton, a possibility that appeared to have been firmly squashed from above by yesterday afternoon.

Mr Bell said that following the vote, he had received a number of calls from Conservatives, the identity of whom he hoped to be able to reveal in the near future.

"[Their calls] are very important to me. I've been spending a lot of time talking to these people," Mr Bell said.



On the stump: Lady Thatcher doing her bit for the party yesterday.

Photograph: Tom Pilsto

But are you perfect? asks Lady T

Christian Wolmar
Westminster Correspondent

I learned yesterday why Martin Bell should never have done it. Journalists are good at asking questions but bad at answering them and to be handbagged by Baroness Thatcher - or Neil Hamilton - is a humbling experience.

Lady Thatcher had just accepted a couple of shrubs, including a Hebe Margaret and a sickly-looking rhododendron from a pair of well-groomed children near Christchurch at a garden centre which rather du-

biously boasted that it was founded in 1742.

She shrugged off a couple of questions about sleaze with the usual rejoinder about fighting the election on "real issues". She moved round to where I was standing and I shot: "Are you happy with Mr Hamilton as a candidate?"

She glared, but did not hesitate: "Are you perfect?" and waited just long enough to ensure that I had no rejoinder apart from a ridiculous, mumbled yes and she was off.

Lady T is going on the stump for the next three weeks until

she leaves for Hong Kong five days before the election. These are regal visits, a gracious presence with just a few more words than the Queen Mother. At the next site, Priory School in Christchurch, a bunch of uniformed five-year-olds, all born after her downfall, were assembled with posies and she busied herself sorting them out as the best backdrop for the photographers. She then gave a mini-press conference to a year-old who was asked: "Wood, has your mother ever been to Europe. Staring at the TV cameras she said: "Britain has

given away too much," suddenly she was blurring out about fish: "80 per cent of it is ours but they export more to us than we do to them," to a bemused Mr Wood.

And then, with Gerald Howarth, the Aldershot candidate and her former PPS in tow, she unaccountably went to the Aldershot Football Club - a team so bad that it dropped out of the Football League when it went bust seven years ago. Aldershot now some seven divisions away from the Premiership and, apart from the appalling potential for metaphors

about sporting and political disasters, most of the team have jobs. They could only muster seven bored players for a kickabout before her arrival. It was a disastrous photo opportunity with the TV crews taking it in turns to read out witty pieces to camera all about relegation and penalty shoot outs.

But she wasn't here to talk about football. Told by an American reporter that Tony Blair was seen in the US as the new Thatcher, she formulated: "They've got the sex wrong, the will power wrong, the reasoning wrong," and so on.

If you aren't a switcher, forget it

If you want Tony Blair to take you seriously, you have to live in one of 57 target constituencies, tell the Labour Party that you voted Conservative last time, and say you haven't yet decided this time.

Then you will feel wanted. You will have received a "personal" letter from the Labour leader as soon as John Major went to the Palace to ask for the dissolution of parliament. You have probably been invited to meet Mr Blair, and the local Labour candidate has been on your doorstep more than once.

Labour's election campaign is based on the concept of targeting. Mr Blair needs to win just 57 seats to have a majority of one in the new House of Commons, and in those seats, taking boundary changes into account, the Tories won by a combined margin of just 146,000 votes in 1992. So, if 73,000 people can be persuaded to switch their allegiance from Tory to Labour, Mr Blair will be sure of becoming prime minister. That is why the key word in the Labour worker's lexicon is "switchers".

This is the small group of voters highlighted on Tuesday by

Tony Blair wants to know you, but only if you live in one of 57 key constituencies, writes John Rentoul

Liberal Democrat leader Paddy Ashdown who said the parties were cynically targeting the marginals at the expense of the electorate at large.

The trick is to work out who the 73,000 people who matter in this election actually are. It is a trick the Labour Party is getting better at, and it remains well ahead of the Tory party in the science of political targeting.

In the 1992 election, Labour achieved a higher-than-average swing in its target seats, worth an extra 1,000 votes in each one and as many as 25 extra seats. This time, they mean to do better than that.

All the party's canvass returns from the last election are on a series of linked computer databases, and these have been maintained and updated so

that Labour knows more about the voting history of its target voters than many of them can remember themselves.

All voters are classified into different kinds, including weak Labour, "positive" Labour, squeaky Liberal Democrat, and the all-important Tory "switchers". Not all the effort is put into switchers, because the computer database is also the

foundation for Labour's GOTV effort - an acronym imported from the United States, meaning Get Out The Vote.

But the big effort is on those who might vote Labour but are not persuaded yet. If Labour identified you some time ago, you will already be used to receiving regular communications from Mr Blair, his deputy, John Prescott, and the local Labour candidate. But it is not just leaflets. Shadow cabinet members are taking time out from preparing to run the country to talk on the telephone to potential switchers who might be swayed by their soft words.

Now, however, Labour faces the strange possibility that they may be, like generals, fighting the last war. Even if the opinion polls are as wrong as they were last time, the real battleground is not going to be these 57 seats at all, or even the 90 which have been designated "key seats" to give Labour a buffer, to allow for some targets to be missed.

Unless the Tories turn the campaign round quickly, Labour could win in all kinds of unlikely seats where its preparation has been much less intense.

The 57 Tory seats Labour needs to win

Majority	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	1734	17
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election '97

Privatisation exposed as Labour's Achilles Heel

Anthony Bevins analyses the background to the policy shift within Blair's camp

Labour's problem on privatisation has been slow to break, but it has been aggravated by the party leader's eagerness to keep on creating "new Labour". When the party manifesto was agreed and published last week, it should have marked the end of all further movement. Unfortunately for Labour, Mr Blair has carried on regardless. Last Monday, he was making privatisation policy on the hoof, and he has left his colleagues behind. By doing that, he has left himself vulnerable to the

Tory charge that Labour is too volatile; it has changed so much that there is no stability - that it cannot be trusted. For Labour, the pity is that its own message that the Tories could not be trusted on tax - having broken their promises of the last election - was yesterday being deflected by the new Labour conflict. Gordon Brown told *The Independent* yesterday that

Labour's policy was quite clearly set out in the manifesto. He was quite right. There is a section on the possible sale of departmental assets - "property, land and buildings" - that are surplus to requirements; there is a section on the Post Office, which says that "Labour favours greater commercial freedom for self-financing commercial organisations within the public sector"; and London Under-

ground would be kept within the public sector. Beyond that, however, there is the question of National Air Traffic Control Services, which Mr Brown said Labour would consider for privatisation in order to provide essential funding. Mr Brown told yesterday's election press conference: "We inherited Conservative plans on privatisation proceeds. Once we had the chance to look at the

Conservative public expenditure white paper, we decided we couldn't rule it out and Margaret Beckett [shadow trade and industry spokeswoman] made that clear at the end of February." The Budget Red Book, which sets out the Government's spending projections, came out on 26 November. Before that, Andrew Smith, the party's transport spokesman,

told the Labour Party conference in October: "The Tories have dreamt up a crazy new scheme to privatise the air. They want to flog off the National Air Traffic Control Services... Labour will do anything we can to block this sell off. Our air is not for sale." More than three months later, another Labour transport spokesman, Keith Bradley, told an air traffic controller who had

written to Mr Blair in November: "I would like to confirm that the Labour Party are completely opposed to the privatisation of the National Air Traffic Control Services." It was not until the end of February that Mrs Beckett told BBC television's *On the Record* that she was not ruling out privatisation. But the Conservatives were missing the essential point yes-

terday - that it was Mr Blair who was not singing from the same song sheet as his colleagues. On Monday, in the *Sun*, Mr Blair wrote: "We have no dogmatic objection to services being run in the private sector. They should be judged on a case by case basis." Later that morning, he repeated that message in a City speech. There is nothing in the manifesto to support that view. Mr Blair has left himself exposed to the charge that he is out of line with his own party.



Anti-gay Tory tiptoes round his polling partner

Clare Garner

Adrian Rogers, the Conservative candidate for Exeter, in Devon, has become strangely silent of late. And for someone who relishes his reputation as the scourge of homosexuality, he is being uncharacteristically reticent.

Usually happy to shoot from the hip, describing homosexuality as a "sterile, disease-ridden, God-forsaken occupation", and attractive women in the workplace as "fair game for anybody", he is making every effort to bite his lip in the run up to the General Election.

The reason is only too plain. The Labour candidate for Exeter, Ben Bradshaw, is a personable former BBC reporter, popular, a veritable Hugh Grant lookalike and a homosexual.

Dr Rogers cannot afford to trip himself up, but then again, he cannot help himself.

Turning down a request for an interview yesterday, he explained: "I'm a hostage for negative publicity. It's helping me being selective. We don't want bad publicity. We don't want some queer media person from London wrecking it."

Ironically, Matthew Parris, the gay former Tory back-bencher, and now parliamentary sketch-writer with the *Times*, who has been known to put pen to paper on the subject of Dr Rogers' bigotry, was visiting Exeter yesterday. Coming face to face for the first time, Dr Rogers took a swipe at his critic. "You should be ashamed of your approach to me. You don't even give a man a chance for a fair hearing," he said.

Mr Bradshaw, 36, who like Martin Bell, another BBC man, is presenting himself as a trustworthy candidate, was out knocking on doors yesterday be-



Gay: Ben Bradshaw, Labour candidate, campaigning in Exeter yesterday; (inset) Adrian Rogers Photograph: David Rose

fore Tony Blair's battle bis-rolled up in the afternoon. While he is not overtly making political capital out of Dr Rogers' rampant homophobia, he does admit that he is blessed with his opposition. "I certainly think Dr Rogers is my greatest asset," he said yesterday. "I've had letters from all parties congratulating me - no, that's the wrong word - welcoming my honesty."

On his first day's canvassing, Mr Bradshaw was invited into the home of a lifelong Conservative. "She took my hand and said 'I'm absolutely delighted with your selection. My brother was gay in a less tolerant age and committed suicide'."

Mr Bradshaw knows that some people are prejudiced, "and it's a prejudice that runs

deep", but insists that concern has been "minimal". He has felt from the beginning that, if anything, his homosexuality would be a plus point, provided he was open about it.

"One, it's radical," he said. "Two, it would smoke Rogers out, which it's done very successfully. And three, it would appeal to Walworth Road after the way it's been treated, that is, put this in your pipe and smoke it."

It is tempting to script one's own alternative manifesto for Dr Rogers, based on a selection of his most outlandish statements. In fact, it is a temptation to which the Labour Party in Exeter has succumbed. Mr Bradshaw's aides keep a file of their opponent's greatest hits which, being well trained in

media management by their candidate, they are keen to share.

Dr Rogers on road protesters: "They should be gassed out of the tunnels, starved out, or whatever the police deem necessary." Dr Rogers on sex offenders: "As there is no guarantee that sex offenders will not reoffend, castration and lobotomy should be undertaken on willing people before being allowed back into community."

And so on. But Dr Rogers came out of hiding briefly yesterday. He had hoped to compare his "Contract with Exeter" with Mr Blair's "Con-Track" by way of a "warm-up act" for the visiting Labour leader. But no sooner had the local GP clambered upon his soap box in the city's Cathedral

Yard, than he was heckled off the political stage.

Eventually, Dr Rogers' minder allowed him a few words with a journalist. He trotted out his well-rehearsed lines. Why had he not been seen out and about in the constituency earlier? "We're limited by £7,500 expenditure." Why is the previous Tory incumbent, Sir John Hannam, not visibly supporting him? "Actually, he's bought a house in the Isle of Wight."

And what about the fact that his opponent is openly gay? "It's their issue, not mine. They've brought it to Exeter, not me. It's their problem."

But it may turn out to be less of a problem than Dr Rogers thinks. Mr Bradshaw's homosexuality appears to be just what the spin doctors ordered.

Welfare state caught in tax tug-of-war

Diane Coyle Economics Editor

Taxes will have to rise or the welfare state will shrink, no matter which party wins the election, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, an independent think-tank.

In a report published yesterday, the IFS predicts that the Government's borrowing requirement would fall this year - thanks to the booming economy. But if the two main parties stick to their pledges to keep borrowing low over the longer term, either spending must be lower than planned or taxes higher.

"Either the current shape of the welfare state will be maintained and the next government will have to spend - and tax - more than planned, or the welfare state will shrink and provide fewer services to fewer people," it concludes.

The IFS calculates that, despite the prospect of a rapid reduction in the gap between government revenues and spending, either party would have to deliver a tough budget reducing borrowing by some £10bn in order to satisfy manifesto pledges. It also cast serious doubt on the possibility of any government hitting the current spending targets. The report calls the plans "very ambitious indeed", noting that the 0.4 per cent year real growth in expenditure pencilled in for the next five years would be the lowest in any parliament for the past 50 years.

The IFS identifies the National Health Service budget and public-sector pay as the pressure points. Current plans have a rise in health spending this year followed by two years of zero real growth. Not only is this far tougher than any previous plans, but health spending has also overshot its target by far in every year except 1991. Unless taxes rise, the result will be a steady increase in private spending on services such as health and education. The report notes that Britain is a low-tax country by international standards, and virtually the only industrialised economy where the tax burden had not increased by very much since 1979.

"These are things that nobody is talking about in this campaign," said Paul Johnson, deputy director of the IFS. He said the Tories' planned pension reform, involving privatisation of the basic pension and creation of new personal pension funds, was particularly radical and could form the model for further shrinkage of the welfare state.

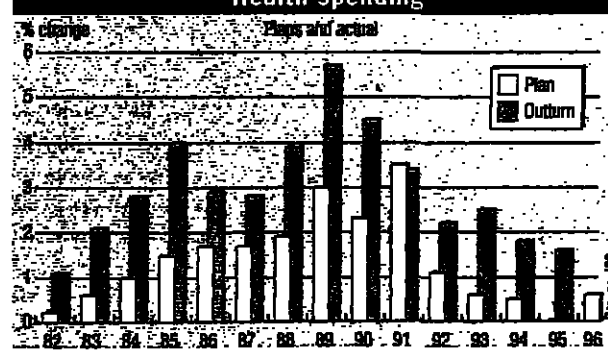
The document offers some

shreds of comfort to both Conservatives and Labour by confirming that we are better off than at the time of the last election, but are also paying an average of £7 a week more in taxes. Each pounced on the finding that best suited them.

However, it criticised both of the main parties' income-tax proposals as expensive measures that would not help the poor. "You can't help people on low incomes by cutting a tax they don't pay," said researcher Julian McRae. The IFS also found fault with Labour's plans for a minimum wage and a windfall tax, and with the Conservatives' transferable tax allowance.

The minimum wage would be of most benefit to households in the top half of the income distribution. The Tory plan to allow the non-working partner in a married couple to transfer their tax allowance to their spouse would undermine the principle of independent taxation, create a big disincentive to work, and be complex to administer.

The document offers some



Parties tussle over 'rising' tax burden

Fran Abrams Political Correspondent

Politicians traded increasingly personal accusations about levels of taxation yesterday as an independent report claimed that the tax burden for the average household had gone up by £7 per week since the last election.

The Prime Minister accused Labour of hypocrisy over the issue, while the shadow Chancellor called a press conference to claim that John Major had lied to the electorate.

At the Conservatives' morning press conference, John Major said the tax burden was "exactly the same as it was five years ago."

While there had been 22 tax rises, as Labour claimed, there had also been 25 tax cuts elsewhere, he said. The tax rises had been necessary in the early years of the Parliament because a recession would have forced spending cuts if they had not been made, he said.

"There is a degree of hypocrisy - and that is putting it quaintly - in what they have to say about tax rises. If there

has been a breach of trust as they claim... why is it that people are £1100 better off?" he said.

Gordon Brown, the shadow Chancellor, said yesterday's report from the Institute of Fiscal Studies showed the tax burden had not remained the same, as Mr Major claimed. "We now know that is a lie," he said.

"So from the party that claims to stand up for the family, families with children have been hardest hit by the changes in taxation," he added.

Mr Brown would not give a commitment that the tax burden would not rise under Labour. The party has promised to keep to the income tax plans of the current government, and its figures show that the burden will rise in the next two years.

He said the Government's own figures showed that the direct tax burden had risen from 20.2 per cent at the last election to 20.7 per cent at this election, and the typical family was paying 14.4 per cent today in indirect taxes compared to 12.5 per cent at the last election.

The IFS report said that the

average tax increase was £7 per week, or £350 per year. While a single earner couple with no children lost £10.40 a week and one with children £12.70 a week, a two earner couple with no children lost £11.20 and one with none lost £13.70.

The Chancellor, Kenneth Clarke, said that while the Conservatives would keep pressure on public spending, Labour would be forced to put up tax. "It is Labour which would risk higher taxes, because they are not committed to our spending numbers for more than two years, and even then their figures do not add up - there is a £12bn hole in their plans," he said.

Earlier, Mr Major had hinted that the Conservatives would rather cut income tax than keep down Value Added Tax.

"We have made it clear during the last few years that our priority was direct taxation. We do so for the reason that it gives people direct choice about how to spend their money."

On Tuesday, he said he saw no reason to believe the Conservatives would have to change the rates of Value Added Tax.

Labour steps in for branches

Fran Abrams

Labour will impose candidates on three seats where sitting MPs have stood down in the last five days. A panel of the party's National Executive Committee will choose replacements for the members despite claims earlier this week that local branches would be allowed to decide.

The revelation came amid allegations from some MPs that they had been offered seats in the House of Lords under a Labour government if they would make way for younger and more favoured candidates.

Seven MPs have now stood down since the general election was called three weeks ago. The final date for the formal nomination of candidates is next week. In St Helens South, Warrington South, Cumberland and Kilsyth and Pontefract and Castleford, local party members were allowed to vote on replacements for John Evans, Doug Hoyle, Norman Hogg and Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse. In the three remaining seats, Kilmarnock and Loudoun, Dudley North and Kingston-upon-Hull West, the national party will decide who will replace

Willie McKelvey, John Gilbert and Stuart Randall.

The NEC panel will meet today to draw up shortlists of possible replacements. It is expected to interview and choose candidates for the English seats tomorrow and the Scottish seat on Saturday.

Among those who are still looking for seats are two MPs - Labour's higher education spokesman Bryan Davies and the Glasgow Central MP Mike Watson, both of whom were affected by boundary changes.

Jack Dromey, deputy general secretary of the Transport and

General Workers' Union and husband of Labour's social security spokeswoman, Harriet Harman, has also expressed an interest in standing.

Others who were shortlisted for seats but did not win included Hilary Benn, Tony Benn's son and a former councillor, Derek Scott, an economics adviser to Tony Blair, John Harman, leader of Kirkcaldy council, and Cath Ashton, a union convenor.

Last night national party spokesmen would still not confirm how the selections were to be made.

Vote for soft carpets and pools

Steve Boggan

Tony Blair rejected Tory claims that he was "cracking up" yesterday after sailing up and down a river in a brightly-coloured boat with an election candidate who wants to introduce "softer carpets" in schools.

Eschewing the Labour leader's plans to reduce class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds, another candidate promised instead to buy all schools a swimming pool.

"They're desperate people, these Conservatives," said Mr Blair, standing four-square with

the candidates. "You will see in this election that they will try to scare and frighten people about me and the Labour Party. But it's they who are cracking up."

Despite Tory protestations and his antics aboard the 72ft barge, Mr Blair had not gone potty. And neither had the other candidates, Alex Doona and Rory Lowings, both aged six.

They were accompanying Mr Blair and his wife, Cherie, aboard *The Redshank*, sailing back and forth along a section of Bristol Docks to highlight Labour's commitment to reducing class sizes.

Alex and Rory are standing as candidates in elections at Oldbury Court primary school. Like Mr Blair, they are standing on 1 May, unlike him, they can make wild promises to the electorate.

Rory, who is standing for the Star Wars Party, said: "If I was Prime Minister, I'd give money to every school in the world to buy a swimming pool."

Then, unprompted by any Labour spin doctors, he added: "I'd vote for Tony Blair. He'd make a good Prime Minister."

Alex called for "more maths and fewer stories", adding: "If

I were Prime Minister, I'd make the school carpets a bit softer."

But it wasn't all serious stuff. When asked why the Labour leader was in a barge, a party press officer replied: "The children are doing a project on transport, so the message is that Labour is committed to improving our transport network."

Barges? "Well, under the Conservatives, Britain's inland waterways have been completely neglected. They could take a lot of freight and passengers. We will make sure that the waterways are used for the benefit of the public."

Forsyth pours scorn on 'fiscal fantasy' of SNP

Stephen Goodwin

An attempt by the Scottish National Party yesterday to promote a pensioners' package worth £12 a week for the average couple brought another withering attack on the "fiscal fantasy" of the party's forecasts for an independent Scotland.

Michael Forsyth, the Secretary of State for Scotland, said the SNP had produced a blueprint for national impoverishment and impotence. The nationalists were trying to enlist the support of voters on a false prospectus, he told a news conference.

But the SNP claims it is winning the economic argument for

independence and will focus on the issue again today. "People have to realise they don't have to stay locked into this union with England for economic reasons," said Michael Russell, the SNP's chief executive.

The party believes that by burying the perception of Scotland as a "subsidy junkie" it will build confidence in people to vote for independence. Polls have the SNP at around 25 per cent but, encouragingly for Alex Salmond and his team, another 28 per cent of Scots give the party as their second choice.

Mr Russell said Treasury figures had shown the party had been right in the past about the

surplus in the Scottish economy thanks to North Sea oil, and it would be proved right in its forecasts for the future.

While there is acceptance amongst economists and political parties of a Treasury figure that Scotland has contributed £27bn more to the Exchequer since 1979 than it has received, the SNP is being pressed on its assumptions for the future.

Mr Russell said a number of economists backed an SNP analysis indicating a surplus for Scotland of £12.5 bn over the next five years. Jim Walker, one of the SNP's top economists and formerly with the Royal Bank of Scotland, was

called in aid by party leader Alex Salmond earlier this week.

But the SNP's opponents are making damaging use of an appraisal of the party's budget by Jim Stevens, Chief Economic Forecaster at the respected Fraser of Allander Institute. The SNP had inflated Scotland's true fiscal position by £18.1bn over the next four years, Mr Stevens concluded. Its assessment was "about as useful as a chocolate fireguard".

But Mr Stevens, as a member of Labour's Scottish executive, is hardly an independent in the matter.

Mr Forsyth said the SNP's calculations were based on the huge oil revenues of the pre-

1986 boom years. These peaked at £12bn in 1984-1985 and, according to Mr Stevens, their like would not be seen again.

"The SNP's own accounting shows that their old fashioned public-spending plans would entail an extra £5.5bn expenditure in the first four years of separation. Since the actual fiscal situation of a separate Scotland would be a deficit of £8.2bn, the consequences of such a programme would be national bankruptcy," Mr Forsyth said.

Andrew Welsh, the SNP vice president, dismissed the Secretary's remarks as those of a unionist with a narrow vested interest in his job at Westminster.



by Anonymous

Up close an election campaign is a farce; a nonsensical confusion. The raw material of it - the speeches and the visits - is ridiculous gobbledygook. Only at home, watched on TV or read in the papers - the backgrounds and obfuscations edited out and the best bits selected - does it make any kind of sense.

Mr X went here and said that. Mr Y went somewhere else and contradicted it. All clear. But it isn't like that for the Candidate. He lives with his nose pressed firmly against the absurdity of it all.

His public day started with the need for some new history. A policy had changed, but it was necessary to show that this was the consequence of some slow, deliberative process. This meant reversing the normal historical pattern, and working backwards from the change, creating a reverse path. There would have to have been meetings, conversations involving senior party figures, and past interviews whose contents could bear no other construction than the new one - all leading naturally to the present moment.

This time the Candidate wouldn't have to bear the brunt of the questioning himself. His adopted brother, the troublesome other half of his political identity, would do that instead.

The ursine Mr Brown, Gerard Depardieu to the Candidate's Tom Cruise, told the tale of meetings, conversations, colleagues and interviews. At the back of the Candidate's mind, the new Machiavelli looked on, his physiognomy a study in edges. Long, sharp nose, sharp chin, sharp cheekbones. Sharp mind, tongue and eyes. Satisfied eyes.

With no direct evidence that the new backward history was anything other than genuine, the London press pack let Mr Brown off with a couple of muffled groans and a small sneer.

Then the Candidate took a train for the West. This involved 15 minutes (and coffee) with the Press Association, 10 minutes (over kippers) with the *Western Daily News*, 10 more (toast and marmalade) with the *Bristol Gazette* - done by the same man - and 10 (cuppin round mouth) with the only representative of the privatised rail company. Meanwhile - kippers - his speech-writer Paul, sat within fact-checking distance, consulting his laptop for West Country statistics. Bristol docks at 11 for a boat trip. Mrs Candidate ("Sherry, not Sheryl as in Demel") was in nautical colours. Her navy blue and white-striped outfit with yachting shoes sug-

gested an act of occupational empathy - rivalling Marie Antoinette's dressing up as a rustic shepherdess. Except that Mrs Candidate's face was cager and vulnerable; completely lacking the brassiness of the happily artificial.

The trip though, was happily artificial. The Candidate's boat, stuffed to the gunwales with gap-toothed seven-year-olds (on a transport project, for Christ's sake), made a few lazy circles around a bigger boat carrying the press. Thank God, thought the Candidate, children aren't self-conscious, they don't blame you for their own embarrassment like journalists do. But big A, the press officer, sat under the cowering - his face a blushing mask of discomfort.

This one was for the photographers, that man tribe of cheerful cannibals, who live absolutely for their own pictures alone. Imagine the boys from Lord of the Flies never being rescued and actually growing up on that island, and you've grasped how snappers are. They push, elbow, kick and punch without rancour or bad feeling. No one is safe.

In Basildon the day before, an old lady hit the deck. When the Candidate moves, they move backwards in front of him, preventing him from seeing those who he is supposed to be visiting, and shielding him completely from their sight. Yet when you see the pictures at home, the photographer isn't there. It's like a beautiful landscape seen from a high-speed locomotive. You think it's wonderful. But all the person actually living in that timbered farmhouse sees is the bloody train whizzing past, making a noise from hell.

Yet all day the Candidate had to smile and wave, turn, grasp tillers and shake hands for the cameras. As he got on, he got off again, to be greeted by a vision in powder blue - heavily rouged and lipsticked - the former "Red" Dawn MP (firebrand no longer, her past somehow dissolved, like a dream sequence from a film) standing on the steps of the quay, awaiting her leader. "This way! Smile!" yelled the snappers.

Hours later, and in the mid-afternoon shadow of a Devon cathedral, the Candidate met the first real people of the day, and rendered them his GP's speech about making things better. Above him, in the sunlit window of the fourth floor of the Royal Clarence Hotel, a young chambermaid leaned against the sill and gave an absent-minded clasp.

media watch

First Tory TV pitch targets changelings

By Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

The Conservative Party made an undisguised pitch for the Essex man voter in its first Party Election Broadcast of the campaign last night.

With four more broadcasts to come from the Conservatives, five from the Labour Party, three from the Liberal Democrats and a number from fringe parties, broadcasters are predicting that an electorate already bored with the campaign would be turning away from broadcasts.

The broadcast was less hard-hitting than its previous film of a woman crying red tears to a background of news reports about a Labour Government. But it did continue the theme of looking to a future under Labour.

The Party asked nine actors to imagine they were taking part in a futuristic vox pop one, two or three years into a Labour government. They were then to improvise to camera the problems they would be living under, supposedly unscripted.

Each actor was fortunate to come up with a set of worries that match exactly what the Tories want to raise in the mind of undecided voters: can you trust Blair on the economy?

"It was a difficult decision because I voted Tory before," said a woman in her twenties filmed in front of a stark tower block.

"But I thought they really had learned their lesson, the Labour Party, the Tories had that slogan 'Britain is booming - don't let Labour mess it up' and I thought, no, they won't do that, Blair won't do that. But they have."

The broadcast, which was finished on Tuesday by the Conservative's advertising agency M&C Saatchi, also tried to



In the future: An actor imagines life under Labour

subtly take on the sleaze factor: "Like most people we thought fresh blood, you know," said a man in a leather jacket. "We believed all that stuff about the government running out of steam and sleaze... and well it seems the further we get into the Labour term the more it was just change for change's sake you know."

The actors chosen represented what the Tories think ordinary people look and sound like.

The accents were all Estuary English - flat, slightly cockney. The women were overly made-up with their hair dyed or straggly, a couple of them were overweight. The only man in a suit and tie was wearing a decidedly threadbare jacket while two of the men wore leather jackets.

These were not sleek Coun-



Future shock?: Shirley Williams out canvassing in St Albans, Hertfordshire

Photograph: John Voos

Ashdown's 'open' mission closed up

Barrie Clement

Paddy Ashdown's crusade to talk to all and sundry without fear or favour, whatever their politics, wasn't quite what it was cracked up to be yesterday.

In fact an "open circle" of education specialists, parents and other interested parties at the Waldgrave Girls' School in Twickenham wasn't entirely open.

Debarred from the Ashdown presence was a mother who ap-

parently turned up on spec and wanted to ask questions about unacceptably large class sizes in local schools for which the Liberal Democrats hold responsibility through the local council.

But Deirdre Razzall, ex-chair of the council education committee, was having none of it. "You are just here to make a political point," she told Mrs Sims.

Ms Razzall thought Mrs Sims had been sent as a "plant" by the Conservative Party in an attempt to disrupt the proceedings.

Mrs Sims refused to give her first name or divulge how she was going to vote - presumably further evidence that she was a Tory. "I'm not trying to make a political point. I live over the road and saw the Liberal Democrats' coach arriving. I came over to see if I could join the meeting."

A likely story thought Ms Razzall who pointed out that those participating in the meeting were politically diverse, "invited" and there to discuss

further and higher education.

Alas, Mr Ashdown's mission to spend what he self-consciously described as "quality time" with the electorate, did not extend to Mrs Sims, who never got to see the Lib-Dem leader.

Anyway, Mrs Sims was told that class sizes were nothing to do with the council. It was all the Government's fault.

Inside the meeting Mr Ashdown asked the 20-strong circle what they would do if they were Gillian Shephard, Secretary of

State for Education. Most of their replies cost money.

The financial plight of students was later brought home to Mr Ashdown on a visit to South Devon College, at Torquay. On the wall above the photocopier was a message to students: "It is a criminal offence to photocopy currency. This area is under security video surveillance." Reported-

ly some of the students had been proffering photocopied tenners at the local pub.



"I think Christine Hamilton is my best campaign asset. I am used to being ambushed in places like Blair but never anything like that - Martin Bell

I am for Britain and I think we are giving too much away to Europe. For example, 80 per cent of the fish is ours - Baroness Thatcher

If and when he is shown to have misbehaved - but only if and when he is shown to have misbehaved - then he should face the House of Commons - John Major on Neil Hamilton

I'd do anything to get Major back... thinking back, things were going quite well... things were nice and calm - Repentant Labour "voters from the future", in the Conservative election broadcast They put tax up almost

straight after they got in, when they promised they wouldn't - A "voter from the future" on the Labour government

I think it is quite wrong. It's stupid and there is no necessity for it. Liberal Democrats should have the opportunity to vote for a Liberal Democrat candidate. We have denied them the right to do so. That is quite wrong and against the democratic principle - Sir Cyril Smith on the withdrawal of the Liberal Democrat candidate in Tatton

Compiled by Ben Summers

'Britain on its way to being a police state'

Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

The spectre of fascism entered the election yesterday when leaders of a campaign run by the actress Vanessa Redgrave and her brother Corin said Britain was well on the way to becoming a police state.

Only vigilance stood between us and the death camps of Nazi Germany, the group's press launch heard. Many politicians were "pinstripe fascists" and somewhere in Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, there were ordinary citizens who could easily end up running death camps.

The Charter for Basic Rights, which calls for the repeal of the Police, Criminal Justice, Asylum and Prevention of Terrorism Acts and the trades union laws, is fielding just one candidate in Tooting, South London.

In other areas it asks voters to question their candidates on human rights issues, but suggests that the Liberal Democrats' views are nearer to its own than those of the other parties.

Mr Redgrave said provisions in the Police Bill which allowed the bugging and bugging of private homes "constitute the sinews and apparatus of a police



Vanessa Redgrave and (below) Saffron Burrows



state." "You may think there is no fascist party here that commands the kind of support the National Front has in France. But here we have pinstripe fascism. There are plenty of politicians whose beliefs are

identical to Le Pen's," he said. The Charter's candidate, actor and lecturer Jan Koenig, said people should consider how the Third Reich was able to take power in Germany.

"I'm not saying Britain in '97 is the same as Germany in the '30s. We don't have as many open fascists yet. But it had to come from somewhere, and that's our warning."

His election address warns voters to talk in whispers or sign language if they have to consult a solicitor.

"Under the Police Bill the police can bug the office. Or your doctor's surgery. Or they can tap your telephone. There are five times more telephone taps per head in Britain than in the USA or Canada."

"The real messages of Britain that stick with me aren't in the manifestos," Mr Koenig said. "They are the homeless in Charing Cross Road, the prison ships off the coast, one in four out of work. The gap between the rich and poor is worse than it has been since Dickens."

The group claims the support of Harold Pinter, and although Ms Redgrave was in America yesterday the actress Saffron Burrows, who starred in *Kamoke*, was at the launch to give her support.



The Independent is on the World Wide Web at last, with a general election web site run jointly with Virgin.

Independent/Virgin Election '97 is a highly interactive site, intended, above all else, to encourage informed debate. It cuts through the mass of facts and figures that make up everyone else's election "coverage" on the web to expose the issues that really matter to intelligent discussion.

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This time, prime target is Mondeo Man



I think the Labour leader is insincere
Susan Lovett



As soon as Major says something, Blair backs down
Steven Marriott



Park outing: Nursery nurses walking their charges in Redditch, where Tories are counting on new signs of prosperity to win them support

Photograph: Brian Harris



If Labour cock it up we will vote them out
Mark Redfern



Whoever gets in will have a hard time
Adrian Blick

A battle is looming in Middle England. Redditch, the Hereford and Worcester town which grew next to one of the country's wealthiest medieval abbeys and which became the needle-making capital of the British Empire is now at the centre of the political struggle for the hearts and votes of the electorate.

In this new constituency of



61,640 voters - the town was formerly part of the Mid Worcestershire seat - new Labour needs a notional swing of 3.2 per cent to beat the Conservatives.

Michael Streeter reports from the key battlefield of Redditch

A major focus for them is what is known as "Mondeo Man", the house-owning car-owning former Thatcherite voter disillusioned under John Major.

For some observers, the phenomenon of Mondeo Man has supplanted Essex Man as the key indicator group to the fate of this election. One Labour source claimed: "Redditch is Middle England. It's typical of the kind of seat where people feel most betrayed by the Tories' record. Tax has increased and there is rising crime." The seat's importance

was underlined last week when the party's deputy leader, John Prescott, kicked off the first of his national New Labour Shows in the town's Palace Theatre.

Yet there are signs of prosperity in what was once the archetypal Victorian boomtown, which became a new town 33 years ago to the day. Nearly 30 per cent of households own two cars, above the national average of 24 per cent, and the number of jobless seeking benefit is 5.6 per cent, below the United Kingdom average of 6.5 per cent.

Conservative Association chairman Frank Myers is heartened by the current boom in the town and encouraged by the way his party won a borough council by-election on 13 March - albeit by just two votes.

"It would bode well for the rest of the country if we could win Redditch," he said. But he conceded: "It will be a tough

Wavering voters plump for the devil they know

The first signs appeared yesterday that Tony Blair's apparent willingness to shift ground under criticism has undermined a little of this support, suggesting such backing may be quite "soft".

Steven Marriott, 28, an engineer, was switching to new Labour but will now probably vote for John Major. "I thought that [Tony Blair] had a list of 10 things he was going to do but at the moment he is just bickering with John Major. As soon as Major says something, Blair backs down. I think he's panicking and he has disappointed me."

Another switcher, Mark Redfern, 29, also an engineer, will still vote for Labour but is disappointed that Blair is not having a television debate with the

Prime Minister. "He has let me down a bit on that. It would have proved he was the right man for the job." But he takes a practical view of a Labour win. "If they cock it up we will vote them out next time."

Local government worker Craig Coates, 37, will back new Labour "reluctantly" - citing health as a key issue, a recurring theme in *The Independent's* focus group. "Tony Blair is the best man for the job and the best Labour leader in my lifetime. But I'm not quite sure about the rest of them - they are keeping quiet at the moment."

Roger Frost, a former British Gas travel manager, and another switcher, believes Mr Blair has been "excellent" during the first part of the campaign.

He welcomes the Tory support for small businesses but says it is belated, and believes any Labour problems over devolution will not matter in towns like Redditch. "We had a saying at work, 'Let's look at the wider issues - how will it affect me?'. People vote for what's best for them. It's also about celebrities and Tony Blair is the man of the time."

Another likely Labour voter, warehouse operative Adrian Blick, 30, in common with many in the focus group, is wary about pledges by Labour and the Tories not to put up taxes.

"Whoever gets in will have a hard time," he said.

Susan Lovett, a former sales consultant, says what she regards as Mr Blair's evasions

have confirmed her decision to stick with the Tories. "I saw him interviewed by David Dimbleby and he did not want to answer the questions. I think he is insincere."

Nor do new Labour's tax promises persuade Denise Sparkes, 35, a dressmaker and supermarket worker. "The Tories have put up taxes but they have now done their worst. Labour could put up a whole load of different taxes."

None of the group regards sleaze as a key issue in the election, which instead seems to hinge on trust - or lack of it. David Bignell, 51, a former British Telecom engineer, sums up the views of those intending to stay with the Conservatives. "It's better the devil you know."

AROUND THE REGIONS

High ground holds key as reds aim to take the blue citadels



"I'm giving them five years to turn the country around. I have always voted Tory, but not any more. Labour can't do any worse, so we might as well give them a chance. Tony Blair has got his priorities right," said Carole Shewring.

Mrs Shewring, 41, works as an assistant in a special school, has two children and her husband was a military police officer for 22 years. This is significant, because RAF Cosford is one of the few centres of population in her constituency, Wrekin. This new seat is named after a hill rather than a town as it does not boast a settlement larger than the Wolverhampton commuter villages of Shifnal and Albrighton.

Mrs Shewring is one of many "switchers" Labour canvassers need to overturn the new seat's notional Conservative majority of more than 7,000.

Across the traditionally blue hills of Shropshire, Labour cannot hope to wrestle Ludlow away from Christopher Gill, one of the Euro-sceptic rebels

not even with the help of Julian Critchley, the disillusioned pro-European Tory MP who is retiring there. Nor can they dare hope for Derek Conway's constituency of Shrewsbury and Atcham, although the swing required, 10 per cent, is well within what the opinion polls suggest.

So the real battleground in Shropshire is Wrekin, which has been split from the new town of Telford, and which needs an 8 per cent swing. Until recently it was right at the end of the list of Labour targets. It seems unlikely that Labour could even have a chance in an area of small market towns and rural villages, not to mention two grammar schools.

But perhaps Mrs Shewring is typical of a horde of Tories who are changing their allegiance. Peter Bradley, the Labour candidate, is so enthused by the reaction he gets that he sails close to breaking Tony Blair's injunction against complacency. "The reception I have had has been fantastic. Of course, we were campaigning at 100mph less than five minutes after John Major left Buckingham Palace to call the election."

This does not seem to worry Peter Bruinvels, the Conservative candidate and former MP for Leicester East, whose campaign only recently got into gear after his formal adoption on Monday - although he has been the prospective candidate since last year. Like Mr Bradley, a Westminster Labour councillor, he is an outsider to

the area, a part-time Ofsted inspector since losing his job in 1992. During his time in Parliament in the early Eighties, he was well known as a maverick right-winger, who once volunteered to be a public hangman.

He said: "The Wrekin is not a marginal seat, it is a safe seat. This constituency fits me like a glove and it is a very long shot for Labour."

Jeff Parkinson, a butcher who has lived in the constituency for 35 years, has voted for the Tories all his life and intends to stick with them. "There have been times when I have moaned at the government - but it's not enough to make me change my mind. At least you know where you are with the Conservative party. I would rather go with the devil I know than the devil I don't."

But if Mr Bradley's doorstep campaign continues at 100mph, Mr Bruinvels may find his glove a tight fit on 1 May.

Amy Bould
Shropshire Star

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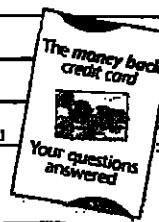
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international

Tear gas and gun fire as a brutal trap is sprung



Crying shame: A woman covers her face as tear gas fills the air outside the home of Etienne Tshisekedi before he left for the Prime Minister's offices

Photograph: AFP

Ed O'Loughlin
Kinshasa

Government troops ambush Zaire's Prime Minister as US declares Mobutu 'a creature of history'

For five joyful minutes yesterday morning, Etienne Tshisekedi, Zaire's veteran opposition leader, must have known how Gandhi felt. As the tear gas thinned over Mandela Roundabout, the diminutive "T-T" emerged from a delirious crowd, hands extended in the

victory sign, marching up Kisan-gani Street towards his first day of work at the prime minister's office. President Mobutu Sese Seko's soldiers, who had spent the morning blocking and bludgeoning Mr Tshisekedi's supporters, let him pass. One

detachment - led Kongolo "Saddam Hussein" Mobutu, the president's son - even began clearing a way to help him through. Horrified by this display of reconciliation, the crowd cheered louder still. Then, only 300 yards short of his goal, the trap was sprung.

As a fresh barrage of tear gas flooded the street, armoured cars screamed through the panicked crowd, pouring automatic fire into the air. The Prime Minister-designate staggered gamely on for a few yards before he was grabbed by soldiers and bundled into a car. His pa-

rade was over, and he never even made it to work. Having dabbled with democracy and reform, President Mobutu is reverting to a style of rule he seems more comfortable with. On Tuesday night, while rebel forces were bombarding the southern city of Lubumbashi,

Mr Mobutu declared a state of emergency and appointed senior officers to govern the five major regions still in government hands. Yesterday morning, as Lubumbashi fell, government troops in the capital, Kinshasa, were using tear gas, rifle butts and ba-

tons to give Mr Tshisekedi's supporters a demonstration of what this state of emergency meant in practice. From the time they left their leader's house until the final rout three hours later, the crowds were subjected to repeated assaults at the hands of Mobutu's troops.

The unrest marked the end of a long week for Mr Tshisekedi, nominated as Prime Minister by the parliamentary opposition just eight days ago. Initially, Mr Mobutu's followers agreed, hoping to use the veteran democrat as a diplomatic foil to Laurent Kabila's advancing rebels. Only one day later the Prime Minister-designate announced he planned to dissolve the unelected parliament and prepare for elections, meanwhile appointing an interim cabinet that contains no Mobutist ministers.

Infuriated at what amounted to a non-military coup, Mobutu supporters announced last weekend that they would no longer support Mr Tshisekedi as Prime Minister. On Monday and Tuesday, opposition students took to the streets to prevent MPs from making good their promise to sack Mr Tshisekedi. Yesterday, flushed with success, they were to escort their candidate to his first day at work.

So at 10.20am a procession of several thousand young men left the Prime Minister's house, waving the palm leaves that symbolise victory in Zaire. Less than 10 minutes later they were given their first taste of tear gas and rifle butts.

Foreign journalists were singled out for particular attention throughout the day. In the first attack a television cameraman and photographer were seized by soldiers, beaten up and robbed of all their equipment. Later, as gunfire echoed over Mandela Roundabout, Zaireans

were appealing for the foreign media to bear witness to their country's shame.

"You see how democracy is in Zaire," said Michel Chel-K, a member of Mr Tshisekedi's Democratic Union for Social Progress. "There is the legal Prime Minister in the street and they gas and shoot at him. Kabila should come now."

Early afternoon President Mobutu used emergency powers to appoint a new prime minister, General Likulia Balongo. With his supporters dispersed and the army in control of the



Mobutu: Reverting to familiar style of government

streets, Mr Tshisekedi was released and sent home.

Yet the biggest loser in yesterday's street battles will be Mr Mobutu himself.

The United States yesterday stated that Mr Mobutu, its long time ally, should step down, and indicated it is trying to arrange a place of exile for a man the White House said was about to become "a creature of history".

The message was the clearest sign so far - and perhaps the decisive one - that the ruler who took power 32 years ago with the support of the CIA has now been irrevocably abandoned by his erstwhile Western patrons. Washington's goal now is a peaceful transition to democratic elections and a properly representative government.

Rebels march into second city

Lubumbashi, Reuter - Laurent Kabila's rebels entered Lubumbashi yesterday, cheered as liberators in Zaire's second city, their biggest prize to date, writes Richard Mearns.

Crowds cheered "Kabila, Kabila" as the rebels arrived in the southern suburbs from the direction of the Zambian border, once the intense gunfire that marked the front line had moved on towards the centre of the copper city of one million people.

Residents said yesterday afternoon that the rebels had not yet entered the post office square that

marks the city centre, though Zairean soldiers were nowhere to be seen. Rebels said they had met fierce resistance some 15km (10 miles) out of town, after which they had marched in. There had been heavy mortar and gunfire through the early afternoon.

"We are fighters who have come to liberate you," one rebel soldier told gleeful staff at the city's top hotel, the Karavia. The staff provided fizzy red soda pop to quench the thirst of the more than a dozen rebels lined up around the hotel.

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Seaside sojourn allows Yeltsin to reflect on Russia's murky depths

New guard left in charge of ailing and corrupt economy, writes Phil Reeves

Moscow — Three months ago, the news would have been greeted worldwide as further evidence that Boris Yeltsin was about as physically capable of governing Russia as Lenin, whose corpse still lies in a mausoleum in Red Square.

Not any more. The Kremlin's announcement yesterday that Mr Yeltsin is going off for yet another break caused but a flicker of interest. Both Russians and the international community seem persuaded at last that the president is back in business.

Later this month he will set off for his customary spring holiday at the Black Sea resort of Sochi where he will spend two weeks. It will conclude a typically frantic two months in which Mr Yeltsin — who tends to govern in sporadic and flamboyant bursts — has overhauled his government, agreed terms for a charter on Russia's relationship with Nato, and set a fresh course towards the free market.

For once, when he gazes across his colossal field of vision, Mr Yeltsin may be tempted to reflect that it has improved, at least when compared with last year. The Chechen war has ended, although tensions still simmer away between Moscow and the new separatist government in Grozny. Fears that Communists and nationalists would seize control of the Kremlin evaporated. Infighting among the government's big guns has subsided into bickering.

There have been thousands of strikes over Russia's \$9bn (£5.6bn) wages and pensions arrears, but no large scale unrest. Mr Yeltsin is not a healthy man, but he also does not appear to be at death's door any longer. The possibility that he might fulfil his term — unthinkable only a few weeks ago, when he had double pneumonia — no longer causes guffaws of disbelief.

But the calm is misleading, for the landscape is littered with lethal snares. The armed forces remain on the verge of collapse; the government, to the dismay of the International Monetary Fund, is still failing to collect its revenues — last month it only raised 40 per cent of its tax target. Russia remains littered with vast, filthy, Soviet-era industries that are either producing unsaleable products or have shut down.

Those businesses that are making money are heavily infiltrated by criminals, many of



Say it with flowers: Boris Yeltsin presenting Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin with 59 roses for his birthday yesterday

Photograph: AP

whom work hand-in-hand with corrupt officials. Despite signs that Russia's moribund economy may at last be reviving, moves are afoot for a deeper union with the even more depressed Belarus, which could prove a heavy economic burden.

The task of overseeing this messy situation while Mr Yeltsin is on holiday falls to his new government and particularly its new reformers whose ranks swelled further yesterday with the appointment of Sergei Prichodko as presidential adviser on foreign affairs. He will be working alongside the man who has become the dapper public face of the Kremlin, presidential spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky.

Captain of the new class is Boris Nemtsov, who shares the number two position in government with his fellow fire marketer, Anatoly Chubais. Mr Nemtsov's first few weeks as First Deputy Prime Minister have paid dividends. Yesterday he was hailed by the All-Russian Public Opinion Centre named him as Russia's most popular politician — fractionally ahead of the

retired paratrooper general, Alexander Lebed, and way above Mr Yeltsin himself, who was seventh.

However, support for the ex-governor of Nizhny Novgorod seems certain to wither. Millions of Russians — already struggling to survive five years of economic collapse — are unlikely to take kindly to government plans to overhaul their housing subsidies. Already the powerful energy lobby in Moscow is squaring up for a brawl over Mr Nemtsov's plans to break up Russia's vast natural resources, transport and energy monopolies.

Although shrewd, Mr Nemtsov can also be careless. Witness his memoir containing his reflections on life and politics called *A Provincial Man*, to be published later this month. The book contains some tart remarks about his new bosses. Mr Yeltsin, though depicted as tough and brave, is sometimes "reckless and careless", Viktor Chernomyrdin is "honest", but "hardly capable of being prime minister in times of crisis".

Diplomat 'spy', page 21

Croatia poll heralds revolt's final chapter

Tony Barber
Europe Editor

In the desolate, war-scarred towns of eastern Slavonia, the final flame of Serb resistance to Croatian rule is flickering out, almost six years after the region exploded in a fireball of rebellion. Voters in eastern Slavonia will cast ballots on Sunday in local elections that will pave the way for the Serb enclave's full and permanent reintegration into Croatia by July.

The elections herald the end of a Serb revolt which broke out in spring 1991 and led to Europe's most violent conflict since 1945. The rebellion, backed by President Slobodan Milosevic of Serbia and his armed forces, was inspired partly by the Serbs' fear of persecution in a newly independent Croatia, and partly by the dream of living off Serb-populated parts of Croatia and forging a Greater Serbian state.

Nowadays, that dream lies in ruins, shattered by the crushing defeats which President Franjo Tudjman's army inflicted on the Serbs in the summer of 1995. For the Serbs of eastern Slavonia, the future holds the prospect not of independence but of minority status in a country with a poor track record of promoting civil rights and protecting ethnic minorities.

About 120,000 Serbs live in eastern Slavonia, including tens of thousands who fled, or were driven out of, other Serb-held parts of Croatia during the offensives of 1995. According to officials in the United Nations transitional administration, which has supervised eastern Slavonia since January 1996, up to 25,000 Serbs may leave the



Future target: A boy with a toy gun studies election posters

region, fleeing across the Danube to Serbia, rather than wait for Croatia to take over in July.

The refugees are certain to include unrepentant extreme nationalists as well as policemen and paramilitary fighters implicated in war crimes. Yet such groups make up only a minority of eastern Slavonia's population, and the UN administrator, Jacques-Paul Klein, is confident that most ordinary Serbs will not abandon the region.

Vojislav Stanimirovic, a moderate who leads the Independent Serb Democratic Party, a bloc formed to contest Sunday's elections, agrees that a majority of Serbs will stay and try to build new lives. "They have little choice, since they have nowhere else to go. Serbia cannot help us much any more," he said.

The chief UN human rights investigator in Croatia, Elisabeth Rehn, accused the Croatian authorities on Tuesday of persistent harassment of Serbs and warned that such actions could easily provoke an exodus from eastern Slavonia. In particular, she cited the burning down of houses belonging to Serbs who had tried to return to their homes in the Knin area of south-western Croatia.

With the bitter clarity of hindsight, many Serbs now see that President Milosevic did his kinsfolk in Croatia few favours when he incited their nationalist passions in 1991. They now have the worst of both worlds, encountering suspicion or hostility in Croatia and indifference or rejection in Serbia.

As happened in the Serb-populated suburbs of Sarajevo last year, Serb hardliners in eastern Slavonia are trying to provoke an exodus of ordinary Serbs by spreading rumours of imminent Croatian revenge attacks. Tens of thousands of Croat refugees, displaced from eastern Slavonia in 1991, are expected to resettle the region after July.

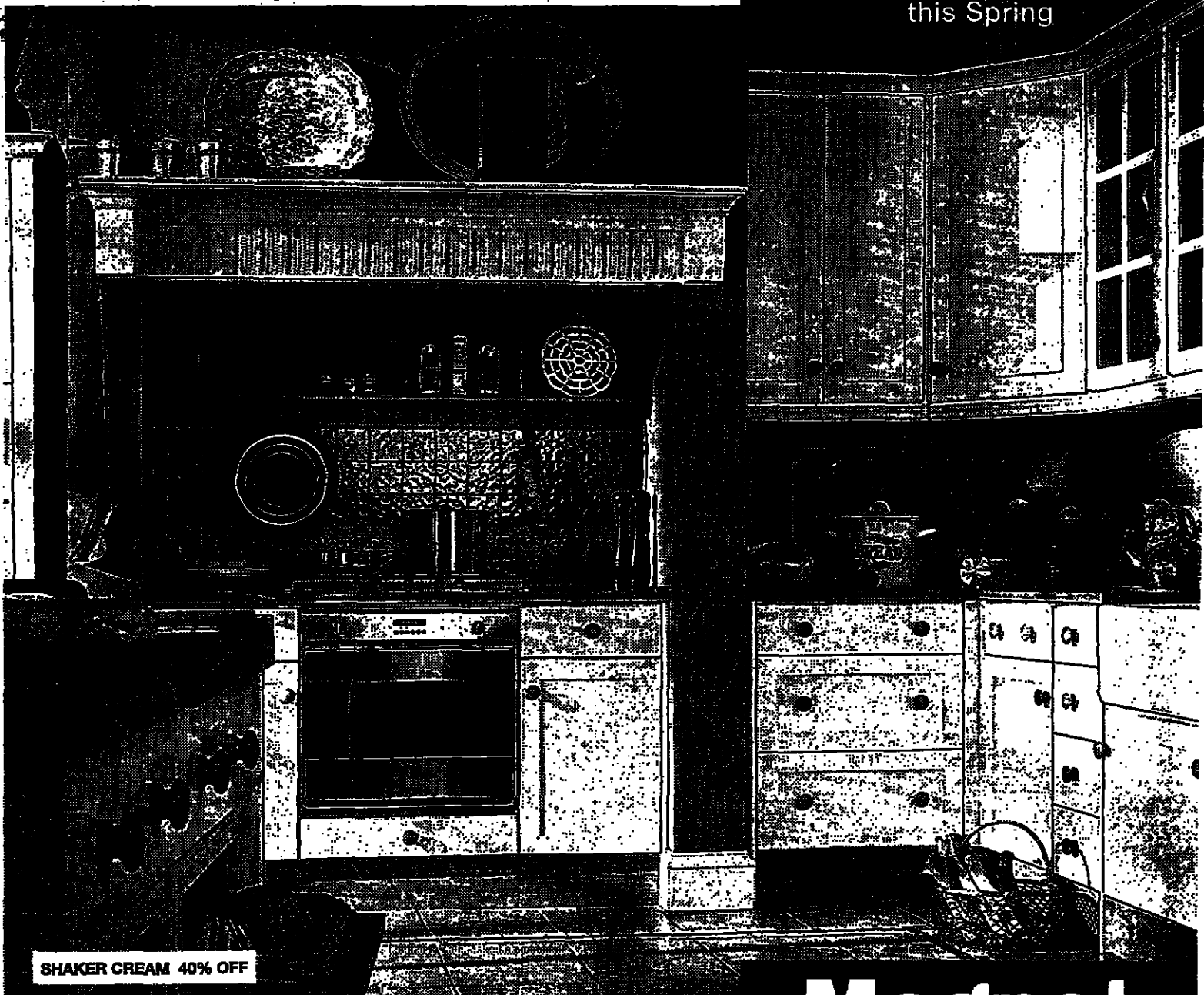
Many such Croats undoubtedly have harrowing memories of 1991. Few could ever forget the Serbs' ruthless destruction of the leafy Danube town of Vukovar and the subsequent massacre of Croat civilians.

Still, the Croat government has solemnly promised the UN and Western powers to protect the Serbs after eastern Slavonia's reintegration.

Whether Croatia will honour that promise will become clearer after the 5,000-strong UN force begins to leave eastern Slavonia in July.

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Ashamed Australia fails to steer clear of sleaze

Howard clean-up stalls as MPs face charges, writes Robert Milliken

Sydney — There is no sign of a Martin Bell in white armour riding to the rescue. But Australia is proving that Britain is not alone with its worries about sleaze.

The Australian government was embroiled in controversy yesterday, as three MPs aligned to the ruling Liberal-National coalition faced police investigations and charges over alleged misuse of their parliamentary expenses.

John Howard, the prime minister who came to power last year promising new standards of probity in public life, has been embarrassed by the sleaze, known as the parliamentary

"rotis" after an Australian colloquialism meaning rackets or deceptive practices. Mr Howard's shame has been compounded by the fact that he had spent weeks defending one of the MPs amid mounting public clamour for the politician's resignation.

That MP is Mal Colston, a member of the Senate, the upper house of federal parliament, who was forced to repay almost A\$7,000 (£3,300) last month after an inquiry revealed he had wrongly claimed allowances for trips. Mr Colston has been accused of flying 3,000 miles across Australia from Brisbane to Perth, on parlia-

mentary expenses, just to claim frequent flyer points, of claiming travel allowances on 43 days since 1993 when he did not travel, and of using a chauffeur-driven government car when he already had a self-drive car funded by taxpayers.

The defence of Mr Colston by Mr Howard and some senior ministers was based on sheer political opportunism. Mr Colston once belonged to the

Labor Party, but he left it in a huff last year when it refused to back him for the job of deputy president of the Senate.

Mr Howard's conservative government needed Mr Colston's vote in the Senate, where it does not have an absolute majority. It supported the newly independent Mr Colston for the job. In return, he has supported the government in getting some of its most con-

troversial legislation through the Senate, especially its bill to privatise one-third of the state-owned telecom.

But Mr Howard's refusal to condemn Mr Colston's behaviour over his use of public money backfired spectacularly on Tuesday night. It came when Christine Smith, a member of Mr Colston's staff who had earlier taken the blame for his false travel claims, recanted. In

a statement that her lawyers sent to the Senate, Miss Smith said her earlier version — that she had kept erroneous records — had been made under pressure from Mr Colston. "I now wish to advise that my statement was incorrect," she said. "I was not responsible for preparing the senator's travelling allowance claims."

Miss Smith said she had initially agreed to help Mr Colston

because she believed him when he told her that the errors were genuine, and that the row was part of a Labor Party campaign to discredit him.

Since Miss Smith's revelation, the prime minister has referred the Colston "rotis" to federal police, and has called on Mr Colston to resign as Senate deputy president. The loss of Mr Colston's support in the Senate could have serious long-term

consequences for Mr Howard's legislative programme.

At the same time, federal police this week laid fraud charges against Michael Cobb, a backbench MP from the National Party, the junior partner in the government coalition, and Bob Woods, a former Liberal Party member of the Senate. Mr Woods resigned from parliament last month amid a row over the "rotis" claims and a separate sex scandal.

Both men have been charged under the Crimes Act with making false claims over their parliamentary travel allowances. They face prison sentences if convicted.

The affair of the "rotis" MPs has tarnished the Howard government's claims to lift standards of public behaviour.



Wheeler-dealer: Mal Colston, left, was forced to repay £3,000 worth of public money while, John Howard, above, the prime minister, must deal with the fall-out

Photograph: Reuters

Palestinians facing 'quiet' deportation

Patrick Cockburn
Jerusalem

In two months' time, in a move likely to have more effect on the fate of Jerusalem than the building of a Jewish settlement at Har Homa, Israel will start a meticulous examination of the right of every Palestinian resident to remain in the city. Those who are not issued with the coveted Jerusalem identity card will have 15 days in which to leave.

In what a report by B'Tselem, the Israeli human-rights group, calls "a policy of quiet deportation of East Jerusalem's Palestinian residents", hundreds and perhaps thousands of people have already been forced to leave. Western consular officials in Jerusalem fear that as many as 120,000 out of 170,000, two thirds of the Palestinian population, could lose their right to live in the city.

So far the regulations have been mainly enforced when a Palestinian needs to renew an identity card, but the Israeli Interior Ministry says that between June and August all identity cards must be renewed.

As a result of the policy, which started early last year but which has been more harshly enforced since Benjamin Netanyahu became Prime Minister,

many Palestinians born in Jerusalem have stopped registering their children. Sa'ad Nimer, 32, who is the mother of three children, said: "I was born and raised in Jerusalem as was my husband. Four months ago they took away our identity cards. Now my husband cannot leave the house. We live in fear that he will be imprisoned."

Elham, a Palestinian lawyer, said: "It is a true crisis in human rights. Israel is forcibly getting rid of Palestinians not by pulling them out by their hair, but by quiet, slow, sophisticated deportation." The essence of the new policy is to force all Palestinians to give documentary proof — often twelve different documents — showing that they have always lived in the city.

Olga Matri Hana Yoaqim, 63, who has seven children, was born in Bethlehem but has lived in the city with her husband since 1952. "In September 1995 I went to replace my identity card at the Interior Ministry office in East Jerusalem," she said. The clerk cut up her old card and told her to come back in two weeks. When Mrs Yoaqim returned "the clerk told me: 'You don't have an identity card. Go to the West Bank'."

Her husband went back to the ministry 20 times but was refused. Mrs Yoaqim said: "I suffer from

diabetes and have kidney problems. When I go to a clinic or hospital, they want to see my identity card. Because I have none, I can't receive treatment."

The Interior Ministry denies that it has a new policy, but says it is merely enforcing old regulations. Responding to the allegation that it has embarked on a policy of deportation, Tova Elimelech, the ministry spokesperson, said: "When permanent residents sever their connection with Israel — maintain their centre of life in another location... — their free choice causes the expiration of their permanent residency."

In fact, it is only recently that Palestinians who live in a Jerusalem suburb such as Ram or Abu Dis have found that their "centre of life" has moved from the city as much as if they had moved to Dundee. B'Tselem, in its report, *The Quiet Deportation: Revocation of Residency of East Jerusalem Palestinians*, says: "Some 18 months ago, the Interior Ministry began to revoke the residency status of persons who moved outside the municipal borders of Jerusalem."

The change was retroactive and introduced without notice so it is only now that Palestinians are discovering if they have the right to live in the city where they were born.

Clinton to apologise for syphilis tests on blacks

Rupert Cornwell
Washington

A quarter of a century after its exposure, the US government will finally apologise for the infamous 40-year-long Tuskegee syphilis experiment on poor and unsuspecting black Americans. The gesture comes amid a gathering campaign by President Bill Clinton to make racial reconciliation a defining theme of his second term.

Under plans being finalised at the White House, Mr Clinton will convene a ceremony — probably in the small eastern Alabama town of Tuskegee, where the study began in 1932 — in which he will formally acknowledge official wrongdoing in an affair which fuelled black distrust of white government.

More than 600 people were recruited for the experiment, mostly impoverished rural blacks attracted in the depression era by promises of free food



Clinton: Racial reconciliation

and medicine. Of them, 399 were infected with syphilis, but were not told they had the disease and were treated with placebos. The aim was to discover how untreated syphilis developed and killed people.

To that end black victims, the majority of whom died, were turned into human laboratory fodder. The experiment continued for a quarter of a century after penicillin was proved to be an effective cure for syphilis. Today, the survivors number just eight, aged between 87 and 106. Six of them had syphilis, while two were members of a control group who were not infected.

Since 1977, when the project came to light, the federal government has paid \$10m (£5.2m) in compensation to victims and their heirs. But no apology has been forthcoming. "The President feels we have a moral obligation," a White House spokesman said.

Attention to Tuskegee has grown since 1995 when Mr Clinton issued a formal apology for the equally unwitting guinea pigs of government radiation experiments during the Cold War.

Next week he will take part in ceremonies at a New York stadium honouring Jackie Robinson, who broke baseball's colour barrier 50 years ago. Mr Clinton is also considering other initiatives, including a White House conference on race.

Pentagon wizardry can't trace lost jet

Washington — For all the reconnaissance wizardry at its disposal, the Pentagon as of mid-day yesterday had still failed to resolve the week-old mystery of what precisely happened to a vanished US Air Force jet, last seen on 2 April heading towards the central Colorado Rockies west of Denver, writes Rupert Cornwell.

Despite using conventional search methods closer to the surface, no trace has been found of the

A-10 "Warthog" ground support aircraft which was taking part in training exercises in Arizona.

The jet, piloted by Capt Craig Sutton, 33, disappeared from a three-plane formation about noon last Wednesday. Its radio signal had been turned off to prevent radar interference among close flying aircraft, while the automatic signal that would have been activated had the pilot ejected had not been picked up — suggesting the A-10 either crashed, or landed somewhere unharmed.

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Daddy, we're all right but we're missing you

Parents have always been anxious about their offspring. From Augustus and Livia in their Roman palace to M and Mme Montaigne on their Gascon estate to poor parents in the contemporary inner city, their concerns are the same: for their children to be healthy and happy, to grow to prosper, and to exhibit just a little wisdom.

It doesn't take much to summon up parental guilt. Incomplete research, tentatively reported, can send mothers and fathers into paroxysms of introspection. Lately, a clique of social pessimists has made a fat living from haranguing working parents, their assertions usually based on slight data and historical myopia. If you want to see bad and cruel parents, Victorian fiction is littered with a host of latter-day panics about the parenting skills of today's commuters should read Dickens (*Dombey and Son*), Samuel Butler (*The Way of All Flesh*) or Edmund Gosse (*Father and Son*).

In such a climate, it is refreshing to turn to an empirical study that is both informative and calm. The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children has not always in the past avoided exaggeration; charities get income by alarming the public. But its report, based on a sample survey of children aged 8 to 15, is measured. It gives no comfort to the panickers, or those politicians (Labour as well as

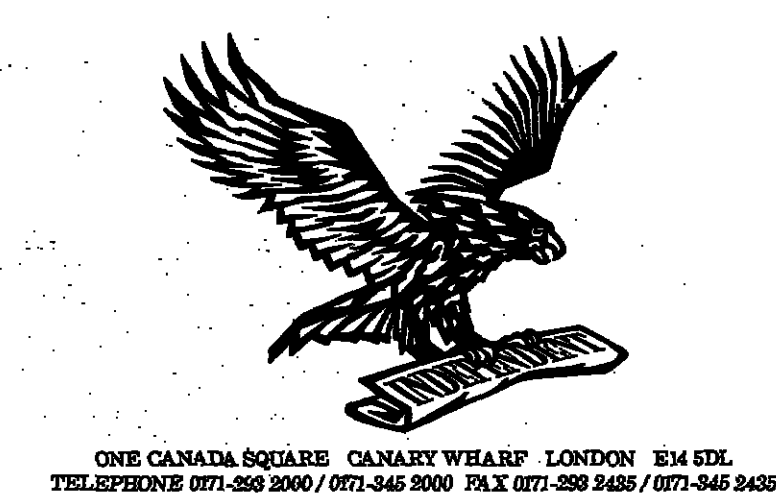
Conservative) who have made the decline in behavioural standards a stock item in their rhetoric.

If real children have worries, they are often about doing well at school. Today's children, including teenagers, accept the legitimacy of their parents' judgements about what they should and should not do – within reason. That most children think it is up to them how they do their hair but up to their parents whether they should be allowed out of the house seems a deeply reasonable position.

If the NSPCC's sample is representative of youth in the late Nineties and so of the generation that will move into adulthood in the first decade of the next century, then Britain's social prospects look benign. Family life, which includes contact between children and their grandparents, is in fine fettle and looks set to remain that way.

The fact is, we don't know how things used to be. We rely on anecdote and adults' selective memory of their own childhood years. With caution, however, it is hard not to register the survey's findings about the extent of touching, kissing and cuddling by parents of their children as a real change. Whether we attribute it to Dr Spock or Penelope Leach or to wider shifts in sensibility, family life is more loving and physically warmer – and that must be an improvement.

Two social facts stick out of this gen-



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erally happy picture of parents and their children in modern England and Wales. If we say the first is obvious, that does not mean it is recognised in public policy or election manifestos. It is the existence of a problem group – "class" is too loaded a term – where parents do not do homework with their children, where they shout more, where material want pinches, where fathers are absent, where children are slapped rather than given explanations. This group is not the same as the statisticians' income classes D and E; all of its members do not live on council estates. But it has a real social pres-

ence, and on the evidence of this report the experience of its children is consistently different – and worse – than that of the majority.

There are lessons here for public policy. They are not simple and they do not all involve extra spending. But they do involve tilting money for schooling, community supports, housing, jobs and so on in particular directions – in other words, redistribution. And that is, we note in passing, a word not much to be heard on the hustings.

A second note struck in this report concerns fathers. Through the figures can be heard the voices of children, rich

and poor, teenage and younger, and they say something compellingly simple: we love our fathers and would like to spend more time with them.

Here is a loud and urgent message. It mocks those men and women who, self-servingly or for reasons of principle, assert that it doesn't matter whether children are brought up with their fathers – and that has implications for the questions of divorce, access and child support. Some 31 per cent of children with a parent who does not live at home – usually the father – never see that parent. What a mound of sub-happiness and lost opportunity for fun, love and instruction lie behind that figure.

Many children whose fathers do live with their mothers would evidently love to spend more time with dad. It is probably fair to say, though the evidence comes mostly from journalism and anecdote, that the reverse holds true, too. There is thus an imbalance in many families' lives, and one of which men – increasingly emotionally literate – are aware. But not, it seems, aware enough to seek to change their conditions of employment, or renegotiate domestic terms of trade. Yet more reason – women will say – for scepticism about "new men", or at least about the existence of men willing to do more than talk about their novelty.

This report is published at a good moment. In the "public space", the electoral battle rages. Meanwhile, in the pri-

vate spaces of families and employing organisations, men and women struggle to make a satisfying balance of work, material aspirations, domestic chores and the needs of their children.

Working women have long had to align the various and sometimes conflicting roles. Now the heat is on working men to effect a healthier relationship between children and life outside the home. They don't need to read the report. But they do need to hear those childish voices.

Captain Kirk in a floppy hat?

Nothing dates as fast as futurology. And one of life's minor pleasures has been enjoying mistakes by science-fiction about the near-future. Cities being crisscrossed by private helicopters? They forgot about noise pollution and safety. A world of industrial worker-bees? But then came the microchip... Almost every futurologist has suggested that people will dress in simple tunics, short skirts, or unisex romper-suits. With the threat of skin cancer growing, earthlings of the 2050s will probably wear huge hats, floppy clothes and long-sleeved dresses, saunter around with parasols, and look more like effete Edwardians than the crew of the Starship Enterprise.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Fundamental belief in Noah's Ark

Sir: "Just because a lot of people believe in something doesn't make it intellectually serious," writes Paul Valley in his article on the Evolution versus Creationist battle (Tabloid, 8 April). He takes it as read that evolution won the battle decades ago. Fortunately for science it did not win the war. Decades ago, Creationists were unable to back up their theory. This has now changed.

According to Mr Valley, I am a fundamentalist and also superstitious with arcane notions. Yet nowhere in Mr Valley's article did I see a sign that he had examined Creationist claims. As I understand it, science is supposed to look at all possibilities before accepting one as fact. If this was carried out neither creation nor evolution theory would yet be scientifically acceptable.

Mr Valley obviously believes in evolution, so what is his definition of fundamentalism? If it is simply belief in creation then how would he describe his belief? If his definition is refusal to look at rational and logical arguments, while sticking to a belief, then he has shown himself to be a fundamentalist.

I believe in creation because the facts support it. He mentions the debate about whether cell life proves or disproves evolution. In this the evolutionists are at a disadvantage. They point to so-called "simple cells" and say they are proof that we could have evolved. These cells are just as complicated as any other found in our bodies, often more so, since they cannot depend on any other cells for support.

All present life is highly complex and it is impossible to do other than speculate about the past. And yet Mr Valley accuses me of being a fundamentalist when I cannot accept something which cannot be proven.

The inability of scientists to agree on proof, inconsistencies in the fossil record and dating techniques could all be discussed. Is it really so hard to believe that a God who managed to create our incredibly complex world could manage to keep animals alive on an ark?

That is not fundamentalism, it's common sense.
MARK SMITH
York

Sir: Noah's Ark need not have contained every variety and sub-variety of today's species ("Creative Tension", 8 April). Both plants and animals can diversify within a short space of time. The 500 varieties of sweet pea have developed from a single type since 1700. The staggering variety of a domestic pigeon comes from a common stock, the wild rock pigeon, *Columba livia*, of European coastlines.

On this basis it was necessary for perhaps 35,000 individual vertebrate animals to be carried on board the ark (estimate given by John Whitcomb and Henry Morris in *The Genesis Flood*, Baker Book House).

A gigantic barge of volume 43,470 cubic metres (Hebrew 300 x 50 x 30 cubits), the Ark had the capacity of 522 American two-deck railroad cars. Each car can carry 240 sheep, so two trains of 73 cars each – less than one-third of the Ark's capacity – could contain 35,000 sheep-sized animals.



every kind of bird, animal and creature that moves along the ground would come to the Ark. Living things employ two awe-inspiring strategies to beat adverse weather conditions: migration and hibernation.

Perhaps the animals used both these methods to reach the Ark and DEBORAH WOOLHOUSE
Leicester

Sir: Islam, like Judaism and Christianity, believes strongly in the Creationist view; that our God, the only Creator of all, has created and founded the universe from nothing, in six days, and that man, animals and plants are created too with no evolution between animals and man.

We believe strongly that Darwin's Theory of Evolution is a theory and not based on scientific facts of evidence. Noah was one of the Prophets of God and Noah's Ark was a true historical fact. God in his mercy saved Noah and the animal kingdom when the flood occurred.

"We (once) sent Noah to his people and he carried among them a thousand years less fifty, but the flood overwhelmed them while they (persisted) in sin. But we saved him and those who were in the ship (the animals) and we made the (ark) a sign for all the peoples." (*Al Qur'an*, chapter 29, verses 14-15)

"We believe that the sign of the ark can be found and proved somewhere on our earth, it is possible that what has been discovered in Turkey are the remains of the Ark."
Dr. A. MAJID KATIME
Islamic Concern

Choices for electoral change

Sir: Russell Clarke's call (letter, 8 April) to Conservative voters to prevent change to the British constitution through returning another Tory administration is doubly misguided.

First, it makes the tacit assumption that change would not occur under a new Conservative government. This is not borne out by the evidence of the past 18 years, which has seen the emasculating of local government, the rise of quangocracy and a vast transfer of sovereignty from Westminster to the markets. Indeed, constitutional change is inherent in a system of government that is predicated on an unwritten constitution.

Second, it makes the explicit assumption that significant constitutional change is, a priori, a bad thing yet it is clear that constitutional change has been used both poorly and well in the past. Extensions of the franchise are an example of the former, and the early prorogation of Parliament in this election may well be accounted an example of the latter.

We voters do not have the luxury in this election of choosing between change and no change, however much we may regret this. Our choice is, instead, between different types of change; we need to decide which is, on balance, for the better, and which for the worse.
STEPHEN HILL
London NW6

Sir: It is not surprising that the major political parties target their campaigns on the 70,000-odd undecided voters in the marginal constituencies, since under our grossly unfair electoral system these people will determine the outcome of the election.

The current government was elected on 42 per cent of the popular vote, but with a Parliamentary majority sufficient to delay a further election for the full five years. This is a recipe for mediocrity and sleaze. In my university 40 per cent is a "bare pass without honours" mark, and so Britain gets the governments its electoral system dictates, but that its electorate scarcely deserves.

If we reform the electoral system so that MPs are elected as at least the first or second choice of a proper majority of voters in any constituency we might have a better chance of good government. I am a long-time Labour supporter, twice I was a Labour parliamentary candidate, but in this constituency, Oxford West and Abingdon, I must vote tactically for the Lib Dem candidate to have any chance of defeating the Tories, under the current system. This is not an easy decision and invites criticism.

Our electoral system must be reformed by the incoming government, please, to make these Machiavellian machinations unnecessary next time. Maybe we do not need full PR, but we certainly do need a modicum of electoral reform.
Professor GERALD ELLIOTT
Oxford

Sir: It is hypocritical and insulting of the Labour Party to think of expelling members who intend to vote tactically. In our present voting system, tactical voting is a matter of common sense.

If the Labour Party disapproves of tactical voting, it should support a system of proportional representation, in which every vote carries equal weight.
LUCY POLLARD
Buntingford,
Hertfordshire

Tory destruction of woodlands

Sir: During the last general election John Major promised that "there is no intention to privatise the Forestry Commission". But 892 of our public woodlands, comprising 109,837 acres, have been privatised in the past five years with massive loss of public access and total loss of freedom to roam.

Conservationists have opposed the sell-off. The World Wide Fund for Nature has said that our most valuable woodlands are not safe in private hands and that the Government has failed for years to close loopholes that allow woodland destruction to continue.

The only way to stop this most harmful sell-off is to get rid of the Tory government.
PHILIP GREIG
Swindon,
Wiltshire

Time's up for Third World debt

Sir: Further to your report ("Why 2000 may come too soon for Greenwich", 7 April), you may be interested to know that the Nottingham Asian Christian Fellowship launched their Jubilee 2000 campaign outside St Peter's Church in Nottingham on Saturday last with considerable interest from the local media in what is considered to be a unique campaign by Asians.

They share the same objective as the London Jubilee 2000 in that they are also calling on the Western governments, the World Bank and other commercial banks to cancel the unrepayable debts of the poorest countries as a one-off gesture. In most cases, if not all, these countries have repaid three times the debts they owe in interest payments.

Their campaign, with the support of the Bishop of Southwell, Rt Rev Patrick Harris, involves the signing of a petition by all churches in the county and other interested citizens.

The principle of Jubilee in the book of Leviticus recognises that the people of God were accountable to one another. After every 49 years, there would be a total redistribution of wealth and property.

It was an opportunity to begin anew and have freedom, land and possessions restored.
That time has now come. It is time for a year of Jubilee.
SAMUEL MONDLE
Nottingham Asian
Christian Fellowship
West Bridgford,

Alienated by sick buildings

Sir: As a designer of air-conditioned buildings, I am fed up with friends asking me to work out why their particular office air-conditioning system is not working properly.

Jonathan Glancey's article ("Does your office make you sick?", 4 April) rightly points out that sick building syndrome is a phenomenon that managers and institutions have been slow to recognise. Many air-conditioned buildings designed in the Sixties and Seventies suffer from problems associated with centralised control which alienates the building occupant.

However, things are changing. There is a recognition in the HVAC (heating, ventilating and air conditioning) profession that the building occupant must be given both a greater variety of working spaces and much greater control over that environment. So it is that many well-designed modern buildings now feature large atrium spaces, light wells and winter gardens.

Technology is now being used to give back control to the occupant. Currently this means more room thermostats and systems in which the occupant can dim the lights.

In the future, intelligent facades will be developed that will modify their performance to suit the prevailing weather conditions, possibly letting in more light in winter whilst redirecting the light in summer.

In Britain we do build most of our offices on a speculative basis. However, there is a growing move towards the pre-letting of developments whilst they are still in the design stage.
MARTIN LONG
Ove Arup and Partners
London W1

All the world on the Isle of Wight

Sir: Can the world's population fit in an area the size of the Isle of Wight? Not according to your Technoquest expert (Tabloid; Science, 8 April) who says that only 1.6 billion people would fit in. Wrong.

Your expert claims to have derived his figure from dividing the "approximately 400 square kilometres (380 to be more precise) by the average space occupied by one person – given as 625 square centimetres. But if you divide these two figures what you actually get is 6.4 billion, which suggests that the current world's population of around 5.6 billion would indeed fit. Your correspondent seems to have calculated the figure for 100 square kilometres only.

However his figure of 625 square centimetres is a bit tight; this is 16 people per square metre.

If you allow a slightly more realistic 10 people per square metre then only four billion people would fit (or 3.8 billion if one uses the 380 square kilometre figure).
PDANT
Eastbourne,
East Sussex

Too nice

Sir: Neil Hamilton has said it all ("Hamilton wins qualified support", 9 April): "He (Martin Bell) seems like a nice guy – totally unfitted for politics".
IVOR SAMUELS

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Leading her husband by the nose

Christine Hamilton is not just another loyal Tory wife – she has been the driving force behind the troubled MP's career. They rise and fall together, says Paul Valley

"Do you accept my husband is innocent?" the shrill voice demanded repeatedly as the hapless war reporter Martin Bell floundered to justify his presence as the anti-corruption candidate in Totton.

The voice was that of Christine Hamilton, wife of the former Tory minister Neil Hamilton, whose once safe Conservative seat is now at the centre of the national storm over political sleaze. He may have admitted receiving lavish undeclared freebies, duping the Inland Revenue and lying to the Deputy Prime Minister. But he still maintains that he never received payment for asking parliamentary questions. She and her husband had hijacked Bell's debut press conference to push the political virgin into acknowledging this point.

It was Mrs Hamilton who made the running. Arriving arm-in-arm with her husband, with her apparently immovable smile fixed fiercely across her features, she announced to the waiting journalists: "We are perfectly entitled to be here. We are voters in the constituency, unlike Mr Bell who lives in Hampstead." It is always, we are coming to learn, the female half of the inseparable Hamilton double-act who leads. She not only acts as his Commons secretary – reading his letters, answering his phone,



organising his diary – she also tidies him up before interviews and her hand even has been seen to appear on camera gently rearranging his hair in mid-flow, as if to reassure him that she had not gone away. But, for all her high-pitched defensiveness, this is no faithful-Tory-wife stand-by-your-man act. Alongside his weak-chinned, watery-eyed apologetic smirk, she routinely appears steadfast, certain and full of high-octane moral indignation. But, though she is dismissive of local suggestions that she is the ventriloquist and he the dummy, she did once admit: "I am the organiser and administrator. I am very efficient, so I have just taken that side over, and Neil lets me get on with it."

She is, she says, the kind of political wife "who gets stuck in and does whatever the job demands". She insists, however, that the relationship is one of partnership: their marital motto she says is WDTT – We Do Things Together. "We have an utterly blissful, unshakeable, rock-solid marriage and always will have. We do everything together – work together, play together."

For all that, she has borne the brunt of the three weeks of unremitting media scrutiny. It is she who answers the phone and the door at their large, cream-painted converted vicarage, set in acres of land with its own stream, dozens of rose bushes and weeping willows, in Nether Alderley, near

Knutsford in Cheshire. It is she who has constantly emerged with a chill school-marmish politeness to chase reporters – "reptiles" and "snakes" – from the daffodil-lined gravel drive and even to upbraid the BBC for parking an outside broadcast van beside the house. "Get that bloody great penis away from the hedge," she said, pointing to the van's large aerial in a momentary lapse from her studied civility. But, more significantly, she is at the centre of what has been called "the web of influence" that prompted the cash-for-questions enquiry. It was Christine Hamilton who introduced her husband to the lobbyist Ian Greer and to Michael Grylls, Mr Greer's close contact in the Commons. It was her signature which appeared on the receipt from the Peter Jones department store for a set of expensive garden furniture for which Ian Greer paid. It was she who booked the room at the Paris Ritz which set the sleaze allegations in motion – and where

she and Mr Hamilton charged everything to their room, even down to postage stamps, and ate every meal on offer, including afternoon tea, running up a total of £2,500 in extras. And when the couple asked if they could return to the hotel – and were told by the irritated office of the hotel's owner Mohamed Al Fayed that it was full – it was Mrs Hamilton who phoned the hotel to check and humbly discovered that there were plenty of rooms available. Yet, in the teeth of all this, she has continued to deny vehemently to deny that she was involved in the cash-for-questions scandal. "It sounds absurd, but our eyes met across a crowded room," she has said. "He had great big Victorian sideburns and was already going grey. It was love at first sight for both of us."

6 With a chill politeness she chases reporters – reptiles, snakes – from the drive

Yet there was a sign of the political steeliness to come. Despite fancying him she did not vote for her future husband in a ballot for the chairmanship of the Federation of Conservative Students but instead endorsed Andrew Neil, later



Getting her spouse's retaliation in first: Christine Hamilton enters the electoral fray in defence of the former trade minister. Photographs (clockwise from top left): Cavendish Pictures; Peter Macdiarmid; Reuters; News Team

the editor of the *Sunday Times*. And subsequently, after three years courting Neil Hamilton, she dumped him when she got her first post in the Commons as secretary to the flamboyant backbencher Sir Gerald Nabarro and later the right-wing MP Michael Grylls. "Poor Neil was a perpetual student. He didn't want to go out into the big wide world, so he spent about eight years at university," she later said. "I just realised that I had to make a break. It was awful, a bit like kicking a dog." She married Neil Hamilton five days before his 1983 election to the safe seat of Totton. There was no honeymoon – the very next morning they were back campaigning in his Cheshire constituency.

Since then she has dedicated herself to his career single-mindedly – the couple "by mutual consent" have no children. She has everything to lose if her husband backs down or is defeated. No wonder her toughness and loyalty are openly on display as never before. (There have been previous flashes when her husband and Harvey Proctor were punched in Mr Proctor's shirt shop in Richmond it was Mrs Hamilton who pursued the assailants through the street.) More recently when Alan Rusbridger, the editor of *The Guardian*, took part in a blunt head-on clash with the extra-trade minister on *Newsnight*, the journalist was advised by BBC staff not to leave via the hospitality room where "Christine Hamilton is offering to plant one on your nose".

It is this relentlessness which prompts a grudging admiration for Mrs Hamilton, even among those with little time for her sense of political propriety. "My husband is not a quitter," she told reporters this week, but there are many who suspect that the drive and determination in

reality emanate from her. "Christine Hamilton has the values of the early Christian martyrs and truly does make one wonder how the British ever lost the Empire," wrote the considerably more glib Lynda Lee-Potter in the *Daily Mail* yesterday, though even she comments on her ruthlessness. When Mrs Lee-Potter interviewed her, the Hamiltons gave her a lift to a taxi rank at the end of their conversation. "It was the middle of the rush hour and as I got out I was nearly run over," Mrs Lee-Potter wrote at the time. "How awful if you'd got killed," said Christine Hamilton. "All our hard work would be wasted."

It was a joke, one assumes. The Hamiltons are good at jokes. Remember the ginger biscuit which the MP quipped he had been given on a factory visit and would declare? (How Mr Major must have chuckled.) There was her jaunty disclosure that "Neil's favourite song" was "The Laughing Policeman". Then there are the toys on the lawn of their Cheshire home which Mrs Hamilton claims belong to a friend's children but which opponents criticise as constituency image-building. And then there is the sign in the porch welcoming visitors with the warning: "If the dogs are loose, stand completely still, do not move, until the owner comes." The Hamiltons have no dogs. Which just goes to show that you shouldn't believe everything you read in print, quips Mrs Hamilton.

Over the portal of the rectory is a Latin motto: *deus nobis haec otia fecit* – these hours of ease are God given. "I think it is true to say that all politicians are in tears," Christine Hamilton once wrote. Come 2 May, she may have both the hours to spend and the tears to fill them. If so, she will surely shed them in private.

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Ireland – a role model for the Israelis

From time to time, whenever the Israeli government behaves like a bunch of bullies, I want to sit down and write an article wondering why the Israelis are behaving like a bunch of bullies, but I never do, for three reasons. One is that the likelihood of the Israeli government reading the article and saying "You know something? Maybe Kingdon's got a point there, maybe we should be nicer to people" is so slight that William Hill would not offer odds on it. The second is that it would have overtones of anti-Semitism. For some reason that I have never quite fathomed, criticism of any Jewish institution has an anti-Semitic taint. (There was a time when Menachem Begin seemed to like to turn this to his own advantage, and would, it seemed to me, defend Israel's actions, sometimes outrageous actions, by declaiming a speech which boiled down in essence to saying "Have you all forgotten the Holocaust so soon? And now you are criticising us?") And the third is connected to an article which, to my uncertain recollection, is the

only one I have ever written criticising Israel, and that was a column in *The Times*, years ago. It was at a time when the USSR was refusing to let Russian Jews emigrate to Israel. It was also at a time when Begin liked to present every Israeli military action, no matter how punitive or pre-emptive, as a purely defensive action designed to protect Israel. So I painted a brief scenario in which I saw the victorious Israeli army advancing through the USSR and encircling Moscow, but purely, according to Israeli sources, as a defensive gesture.

The only point I was making, if any, was that there had to be a limit to the description of your military actions as defensive, but that was not how the readers saw it. Three days later the editor of *The Times*, Charles Douglas-Home, rang me up and said he had been made miserable by the concerted phone calls he had had from Jewish organisations and lobbies protesting against the tenor of my piece. Couldn't I, he said, placate them by writing a piece criticising the Arab world? This was a pretty dumb suggestion, and I said so, and



Miles Kingdon

he shyly agreed that it was, so we came to a compromise. I said I would lay off Israel, in future, even if I were to leave *The Times* and go to *The Independent*, which was pretty far-sighted of me, as the paper did not even exist then. So that is why you will not find me going around criticising Israel. It is in memory of a promise I made to the late Charles Douglas-Home. I will say one thing, though. It is curious the way in which Israel's image has changed over the years. Once upon a time Israel was the underdog, the little guy who got pushed around by the big guys but always outsmarted them.

When things happened like the Munich shootings, they had a surge of world sympathy. They pulled off daring stunts, like rescuing hostages from Uganda, or bombing Egyptian aerodromes from the wrong angle and fooling everyone, and we all thought this was pretty smart. That has all gone now. Israel is seen more as a bully boy today, with the USA hanging around like a huge but simple-minded bouncer. In fact, it is curious the way the image of a country can change at all. You would imagine that our view of a neighbouring state or people would stay pretty constant, but it doesn't. It seems hard to believe that France was once our great enemy, but she was, and for far longer than we have ever thought of Germany as a foe. Germany is no longer the foe, either, nor the USSR. That leaves only Australia...

And now magically it has, and although some of the Irish are still good at bombing (and we are still good at putting the wrong people inside for doing it) the image of Ireland has changed entirely. Nowadays Ireland is thought of as a place that produces great writing and great dancing (from the knees down, at least) and great comedians and great beer and great television comedy and great music, and great runs in the World Cup, and great films, and when the Irish do occasionally do something genuinely stupid (such as be fooled into winning the Eurovision Song Contest year after year) we only chuckle sympathetically. So, Israel, take heart. Things do get better. NB I also have a leaflet available which I can recommend called *The English as Others See Us*. It contains fairly shocking and unpleasant material, and should not be read by the faint-hearted.

تمكنا من الأصل

The strange case of Britain's 'spy' in a Moscow jail



Nicholas Bethell

He is 28 years old. He looks 70, with a long beard, like Dostoyevsky when he returned from Siberia

A few days ago, when I was guest on a phone-in on Moscow Echo radio, the interviewer asked me about the Platon Obukhov case. Platon is the 28-year-old Russian diplomat who was arrested exactly a year ago on charges of spying for the British secret service, as a result of which several members of the British embassy in Moscow and of the Russian embassy in London were expelled on a tit-for-tat basis reminiscent of the Cold War.

I said that I knew very little about it. I had no idea whether or not Platon was spying. However, I had heard that he has mental problems, which would complicate the legal position. If he was spying for Britain, he might be tried under Russian law. But if he was mentally ill at the time, any trial on such a charge would be a travesty of justice. A man cannot be a schizophrenic and a traitor simultaneously.

Returning to the Metropole Hotel late that evening, I was telephoned by Anatoli Kucherenko, Platon's lawyer, inviting me to call on him. The next morning I went to his office and spoke to him for an hour. I also met Olga Obukhova, Platon's mother. Platon's father, Aleksei, is an eminent Russian diplomat, a former Soviet deputy foreign minister and a disarmament expert. A year ago, when Platon was arrested, his parents lived in Copenhagen, where Aleksei was ambassador.

Anatoli and Olga asked me to explain Platon's case, and especially his medical problems and the conditions under which he is being kept, to Amnesty International and other world organisations. I have done this.

One could say that the story so far shows how dramatically democracy has advanced in Russia in recent years. Until a few years ago I was not allowed into Russia, still less to speak on the radio, and it would have been the kiss of death for any Moscow defending lawyer to ask a foreigner to help his client, especially in an espionage case.

But the story has another side, for which I was not prepared. The Russian security service (known as "FSB") has seen better days. It used to be the all-pervasive KGB, with hundreds of thousands of staff and millions of occasional informers. Its men and women were well paid. But now, with the Cold War being over, its value is under question and its budget is always being cut. The suspicion is that the FSB is using the Obukhov case to justify its existence.

A year ago officers of the FSB announced the discovery of 38 spies in high Russian positions. The arrest of Platon was proclaimed as the smashing of a ring of super-spies and the first in a series of future FSB successes. Russians waited with bated breath to find out who the other 37 would be. But no names have been announced and some Russians are sceptical enough to wonder whether they exist at all.

Having announced this great catch, it is embarrassing when they have only one minnow to show for it. And it is even more embarrassing when it emerges that Platon has a history of mental health problems, kept secret since his childhood by his professionally successful family, and that he is in no condition to be put

up as a defendant in the sort of show trial that they would like to see.

Anatoli and Olga painted for me a picture of a deeply disturbed young man - of great energy, a linguist and a writer. He has written 18 books, eight of them already sold for £2,000 each to publishers who specialise in intrigue, spies, violence and sex. "My son is ill, but he is not an idiot," Olga says. "He lives in an upside-down world all of his own. His latest book is called *The Murder of the Mayor of Vladivostok*."

His other books, which his mother showed me, all laid out on a table, have similarly lurid covers and titles: *Femme Fatale*, *Game of Death* and *The Sex Demon*. They are books, it seems, that Muscovites read in the metro. He writes at amazing speed, 20 pages a day, and poetry in English about sharks and phantoms. It is the product of a disturbed mind.

Platon spent last summer in Lefortovo prison under interrogation. On 28 July, he was shown on Russian television blabbering incoherently, wearing a smock, a dunce's cap and mismatching socks. "The aim was to humiliate my client, to make people hate him," Anatoli says. "In fact, people just felt sorry for him." Anatoli complains that his client is being denied medical and legal help as well as visits from his family. "Things are supposed to have changed in this country. But my client's case shows the FSB behaving like the KGB did in the old days."

The FSB by now understood its problem. Could it really present this sad creature as an evil super-spy? On 5 November it transferred him to the infamous Serbsky Institute, where Vladimir Bukovsky and other well-known dissidents used to be tortured because of their political views. He was examined by psychiatrists appointed by the ministry of defence. Doctors nominated by his family were allowed no access. On 5 February this year he was transferred to the infamous Butyrka prison to await his trial.

"That report has been written and rewritten many times," Olga says. "It was made known to her early this week and yesterday on the telephone from Moscow she told me what it says. Platon is mentally ill, it seems. But he became mentally ill in prison. When he committed his act of treason for British intelligence he was sane. That means apparently that he can now be treated for his illness. Then, when he is fit to stand trial, he can face the charge of treason in court and, if convicted, undergo the appropriate penalty."

Meanwhile, he lives in a 15-man cell in Butyrka jail. There are four bunks in which the men take turns to sleep. Anatoli saw him a week ago. "He is 28 years old. He looks 70 years old, with a long beard, like Dostoyevsky when he returned from Siberia."

The only food provided in the cell is cabbage. Prisoners are expected to be fed by their families. Every few days Olga goes to Butyrka and queues for four or five hours, in order to deliver a parcel to her son. No metal or glass is allowed in the parcel and no coffee. Chocolate is permitted. She knows that the better the parcel, the better her son is liable to be treated by the 14 other disturbed men who share his cell.

Blair begins to feel the electoral heat

by Andrew Marr



Labour's poll lead has encouraged a stultifying caution, and made the party vulnerable to attack from the Tories and the voters

It's moving. Something is happening. For the first time since the election campaign began, the Conservatives are coming alive and New Labour seems a little vulnerable. This is a feeling, a pricking of the thumbs, not a poll-led observation - though the first tremors in Labour's huge lead have been reported. John Major is suddenly a little bouncier. Labour people have been squirming under fire from the Tories and, more importantly, the voters.

It had to happen sooner or later. The great thing about elections is that they are political accelerators: they speed up argument and analysis. Up to now, the country's attention has seemed to be half off the campaign. But the imminent prospect of a political execution concentrates the mind wonderfully. And clearly, though the election may not be wide open, it is not over, either.

Labour is being attacked for changing its mind and mimicking the Tories. What are the old policies that you still believe in, its leaders are asked. Why have you changed your mind on so many important things? And, as one voter said to Robin Cook on BBC Radio's *Election Call*, why should anyone prefer "Labour margarine to Tory butter"?

This line of attack is exactly what John Major and his people have been using in the House of Commons for months, though voters are expressing it better. In logic, it is unfair on Labour. It is the old damned-if-they-do, damned-if-they-don't Conservative encirclement strategy: either Labour hasn't really changed, in which case they are dangerous or they have changed, in which case they are inconsistent and synthetic.

Either way, the logical conclusion is that only the Tories can ever be trusted to govern - which hardly chimes with our experience of the past few years. Labour, though, has made this strategy easier for the Prime Minister than it might otherwise have been. After taking cleverly towards more popular and centrist positions, they have moved too close to the Conservatives in recent weeks, while being too timid about emphasising their own distinctive agenda.

Without Gordon Brown's adoption of Kenneth Clarke's borrowing and spending totals, Labour would not have been so vulnerable to the £1.5bn "tax hole" charge and would not have had to emphasise its readiness to embark on a new privatisation programme - and would not, therefore, have contradicted itself on the air traffic control sale and fallen into yesterday's problems.

This is how policies unravel; and there are other examples. Had Blair not been concentrating on Tory thinking about devolution, and minimised his own policy of Scottish home

rule with the "English parish council" comparison, last week's policy problem would have been avoided. This business of trying to offend nobody is unsustainable.

It also means Labour is failing to exploit its strongest alternative-selling points and bold pre-electoral thinking. It doesn't highlight its own good policies on predatory pricing - presumably because it doesn't want to offend Murdoch. Or take political reform. Blair is fastidiously leaving the sleaze issue, for the most part, to the newspapers and political outsiders like Martin Bell.

One can understand his thinking. For many people, "sleaze" has become a turn-off. The word, though sibilantly irresistible, is unhelpful to the extent that it confuses sexual escapades with serious allegations of corruption and the abuse of power. But there are real issues here which ought to be close to the heart of the election campaign.

Don't get me wrong. We should wish Bell well. It has been instructive to see the possessive fury of the Tory politicians and pundits at the presumption of a mere war correspondent butting into their game - what right has he, they ask, what experience and knowledge? (The experience, I suppose, not to trouser envelopes from tycoons stuffed with high-denomination notes.) Were Bell elected, that would be a cheering thing for democracy, not a coup by the cynical metropolitan media. The best thing about Martin Bell MP would be that he would not be obliged to take a party whip or line; a Commons which contained at least some free radicals and independent spirits would have a far better chance of regaining its popularity than one that didn't.

But the problem with what is happening in Taiton is that "sleaze" has been removed from the bigger political context and turned into a personal struggle, the honour or lack of it of one Conservative ex-minister. This implies that the issue of government conduct can be resolved by verbal jousts on Knutsford Common or a show of hands in a Cheshire pub. Indeed, Major and Michael Heseltine are saying already that we should be putting these sorts of issues behind us.

Which is, the moment you think about it, the equivalent of saying that we should be putting some of the most dramatic political events of the past few years behind us.

Had Labour been more confident and excited about its programme of political reform, it would have been explaining how standards in public life, past governmental failures such as the BSE saga, the murkier corners of party funding, the erosion of public service and the spread of quangos are all connected - how, during the past 18 years, a closed, dank web of favours and private relationships has spread through the heart of the British state.

Labour people would have been reminding the country that "Nolan", far from being a catch-all Tory rebuttal to questions about standards, was set

up as a defensive measure; and that Major tried in the Commons to neuter the committee's impact. They would have been raising the Scott inquiry, and the Government's frankly shabby response to it. Blair would have been banging on, day after day, about freedom of information, new rights and the repair of democracy.

Labour, in short, would have been replying to the perfectly proper scrutiny of its recently buried beliefs, with a similar scrutiny of the Conservatives' recently buried actions. But no: for some reason, political reform is deemed unsuitable as a mainstream election topic. It has been as if Labour is slightly alarmed about its own constitutional agenda.

The reason, I assume, is that Labour's huge poll lead has encouraged a strategy of caution and conservatism, focused only on the Middle English swing voters who are deemed all-important. Logical enough; but it means that the party which ought to be challenging has become the incumbent, and the party of 18 years in office is attacking like the Opposition. Labour is standing there holding its popularity with Middle England like some huge, rare and infinitely fragile glazed pot, which might crash to the ground if it attempts to move a muscle - or even breathe out.

The overall impression of a Labour press conference is of a roomful of zipped lips, buttoned imaginations and clenched buttocks - a party trapped by its own opinion-poll lead. The atmosphere is oppressive, and only made more so by the moronic pop song, "Things can only get better" that echoes through the campaign - somewhere between Prozac and Muzak.

Now it may be that all this is nothing but shrewd realpolitik and will give New Labour a victory of historic and breathtaking proportions. Blair has taken his party to the very edge of such a victory, and to a hugely impressive position, partly because of the tight control he and his team exercise, and partly because of his own brand of reassuringly centrist politics. He has created a broad, if shallow, coalition of views and interests far wider than before. Perhaps nothing matters more than three more weeks of self-discipline, caution and risk-avoidance.

But the political accelerator is at work, and this campaign is coming jumpingly alive. And it is hard to be persuasive while you're biting your tongue.

Nemesis arrives in the shape of a tax inspector demanding a frightening amount based on earnings in some parallel universe

john walsh



I met up with Nemesis last Saturday. She was nothing like what I expected. Let me explain.

For some years now, I've been having this intense relationship with the Inland Revenue. They're a weird bunch. First they send you a frighteningly off-the-wall estimate of how much cash you might owe if you lived in some parallel universe where a) you earned £370,546,929 per annum and b) all the tax you owed in every one of your 75 previous karmic existences had, in addition, fallen due at exactly the same time, ie autumn 1996. So you look at this figure, marvel at its extravagance and wonder how to fight back. You get an accountant to fight your case with the tax authorities, pointing out that, taking into account three bus tickets and a modest invoice from the Stockport Restaurant in London W1, your tax liability should in fact be £102.02.

The Revenue respond with redoubled fury. They bombard you with demands for ever-more-unfathomable amounts of money. A hizzard of buff envelopes begins to silt up the front hall. Forcing one of them from the slavering jaws of the family Labrador (trained to attack anything with the legend OHMS), you make out the words "...now stands at £237,596,574,076.60. Interest continues to accrue daily."

How did this happen? Once you worked, you earned a bit, you did a bit of overtime, you owed a bit of tax, bit of overtime was fine - then everything went fine - then the WOOM! All next thing, you owe the people at Taxation Central more than the combined debts of Robert Maxwell, the Duchess of York and the government of Mexico. Your accountant is not your friend any longer. He has sided with the baddies. More buff envelopes cascade upon you. Your few sad last grey hairs, they promise penalties, court appearances,

the Marshalsea nick, the Little Base. Wild remedies occur to you. Perhaps I could plead with the European Court of Human Rights. Perhaps I could get some hired muscle ("So you want to discuss tax assessment No 531874, do you, Mr Snodgrass? I think you'll have to talk it over with my friend here...") against the day they come for me. Because you know you're now beyond the point of being physically able to write a cheque to your tormentors.

You stop eating. The children look at your bagged face and run yelping to school. The words "distrain your chattels" - which have appeared in the most recent buff envelope - nag in your head, like a *Fifties B-movie*. You know they'll come any day now, the bailiffs, a couple of beards, a SWAT team of marksmen and, in the middle, a

smoothly efficient sadist in a car coat and an atrocious haircut, saying: "Right, first we'll take the hi-fi, the Apple Mac, the electric orange-squeezing thingy in the kitchen and your favourite swirly waistcoat. Then the lawnmower, the dishwasher and the baby..."

And in the end, Nemesis did

arrive. Saturday morning, 10.45, the doorbell rang, and a small Irish woman appeared on the doorstep, like Delia Smith only a smidgen more determined. "Have you got a minute?" she asked. "We must have a word about some unpaid tax," as if she'd noticed some of the stuff lying tragically in the road. I looked around. Where were the bailiffs? The trained musketeers? Where...? "I'll only take a minute," she said, brushing past.

Five minutes later, she shimmered out again, bearing a cheque (not all that big) in triumph and heading for her bus. I hated the Inland Revenue more than ever, but months of gathering clouds, a slow-building avalanche of angst and trauma, had all suddenly evaporated. I went out into the spring sunshine, hopelessly skint and oddly redeemed.

Political surprise of the week was surely Jeffrey Archer's blurted revelation on Channel 4 the other night that he calls John Major "Sir" when they're together. It's apparently his normal form of address when the two are driving around chewing the fat about the prospects of a Labour government. It seems an odd picture, doesn't it, the two classless-society boys, one now a lord, the other now the Prime Minister, deferring away to each other like courtiers at Versailles. You wonder if Archer was taking the mickey and using the word in inverted commas, as if to say, "I'll call you 'sir' as long as you remember that I'm a peer of the realm and you're just a career politician." But then it's more likely that Lord Archer just likes the smell of courtliness, the tat of chivalric exchange. I expect the PM had to stop him saying "Sire". Or, indeed, "My liege..."

"The Beverly Hills Tour of London" is how they describe it in the brochure - a chance to gawp at "celebrities" going about their ordinary lives. In Los Angeles it's part of the tourist itinerary. You drive up in a coach, park outside the Madonna's hacienda or Sly Stallone's penthouse, dish out binoculars to the \$30-a-head suckers from New Jersey, and pretend that the sight of a film star's mailbox, door knocker or velvet curtains is the next best thing to having dinner with them. Sadly, it almost guarantees you won't spot anybody at all. Now it has come to London. "Showbiz Tours" (there is, at present, precisely one tour) is offering to squire clutches of rubber-necking tourists round the "Driveways of the Rich and Famous" in Hampstead and St John's Wood. That word "driveways" is so redolent of British diffidence, of patio-doors blandness: we will not show you these people's homes, but we will point out their front path, their silver birch, their wheezy-bin...

The lucky recipients of this attention are a mixed bag. The adjectives "rich and famous" may well describe Peter O'Toole and Emma Thompson, but seem hardly appropriate to describe John Keats (though you can see "the tree under which Keats composed his legendary *Ode to a Nightingale*"), nor George Orwell, John Constable, HG Wells, Freud, RL Stevenson... Cummingly, Showbiz Tours mixes dead blue-chip, blue-plaque writers with living rock stars such as George Michael and Boy George, as if they shared the same celebrity status, presumably in the hope that the thicker star-spotters won't be able to tell the difference; the next stage is to convince them that the man with the wispy moustache emerging from the corner shop with 20 Woodlarks is indeed the author of *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*...

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Ladbroke chief under fire after 266% rise

Jim Levi

Ladbroke Group's incentive scheme for directors came under attack yesterday after it emerged that Peter George, chief executive, pocketed almost £1.3m in 1996 – a 266 per cent rise over the £481,000 he was paid in the previous year.

At the centre of the controversy is Ladbroke's long term incentive scheme, which was introduced when Mr George became chief executive three years ago and which rewards directors on the performance of the share price of the betting shops, casinos and hotels company.

Even Ladbroke's remuneration committee, headed by John Jackson – chairman of the group, admits that the scheme could be over generous.

The committee will propose at next month's annual general meeting to make the scheme more demanding, mainly through changing the performance measure to a mixture of share price performance and earnings per share growth. And the committee also wants the rewards to be made in shares rather than cash.

The current scheme is based on a rolling three year share price performance which only

began to pay off at the end of last year. In the three years 1994-96 the Ladbroke share price rose 42 per cent placing the company in 23rd position among the 93 constituents of the FTSE 100 which survived those three years in the index.

A points system for each executive with a value per point of £1.60 for being in the top quarter in terms of share price performance gave Mr George £600,000, and £800,000 shared between three other directors. They were Mike Smith, who received £400,000, Brian Wallace, who picked up 234,000, and David Jarvis, who got £166,000.

The huge leaps in the pay packets prompted sharp reaction in the City. Paul Heath, leisure sector analyst at UBS said: "The scheme came into effect at a usefully low point in the share price cycle for the company. Certainly the City does not believe the performance has been achieved by exceptionally good management."

He added: "Shareholders certainly want incentives for the directors but I believe they should be more related to earnings and return on capital rather than share price performance which is not really the right yard-

stick for measuring management performance."

However, the scheme has some supporters. One analyst said: "How else do you deliver shareholder value except in relation to the share price? The concept of total return to investors is now widely accepted."

Even so, another analyst said that nobody expected the directors of Ladbroke to return the big bonuses they have collected if the share price were to go into a tailspin.

The pay details, contained in the latest annual report and accounts, also show that on top of last year's 266 per cent rise in Mr George's pay packet he gained a £40,000 rise in his basic salary to £450,000.

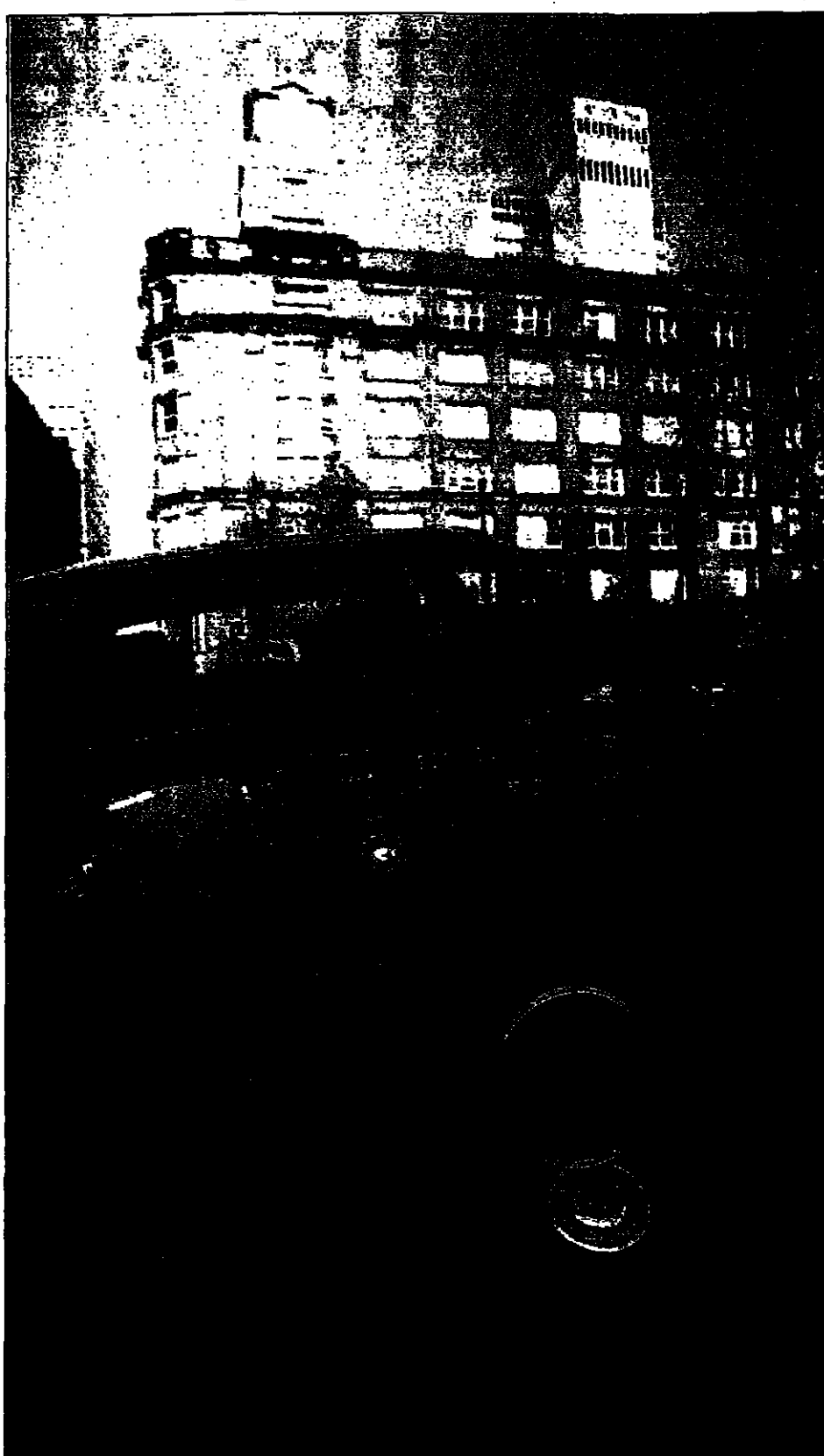
In addition his pension scheme was topped up by a further £279,000. Mr George, now 53, joined the company as a teenager on the betting shops side. He took over the reins as chief executive at the beginning of 1994 from the company's founder, Cyril Stein. In all the pay of the four executive directors rose last year from £1.86m to £3.6m. Mr George, 53, has been with Ladbroke since he was a teenager.

Mr Jarvis, who left Allied Domecq in August 1995 with a £688,000 pay-off and joined the company two months later to run the hotels business, collected £657,000 in 1996. He was paid £98,000 for three months' work in 1995.

Mr Smith, who runs the betting shops chain, collected £846,000 against £399,000 a year earlier. Finance director Brian Wallace collected £640,000 versus £265,000.

Separately, compensation payments of £564,000 were paid to two former directors of T&N last year, while the group's chairman, Sir Colin Hope, received an unchanged basic

Andrew Regan would slash annual bill and strip out layers of management



New for old: A Co-op executive's car parked outside the Co-op Bank and the old Co-operative Wholesale Society building in Manchester. Photograph: Newsteam

Lanica plans £10m wholesale cuts for Co-op

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

Andrew Regan would cut the Co-operative Wholesale Society's central costs by £10m, introduce bumper incentive schemes for employees and prune middle management if his approach to the Co-op movement proves successful.

The details are the first to emerge of the 31-year-old's strategy if his Lanica Trust vehicle wins control of parts of the CWS's non-food interests.

Though Lanica would not comment yesterday, it is understood that it has estimated the CWS's central office costs in Manchester to be around £16m per year, including heavy costs for the executive committee and support staff. Some two-thirds of the costs would be stripped out.

The Co-op employs 2,500 staff in the main Manchester offices of the CWS, Co-operative Insurance Society, the Co-op Bank and the Co-operative Union.

Lower-level jobs at the CWS would not be severely affected by Mr Regan's plans. Incentive schemes would be introduced to motivate the rank and file. These would be similar to schemes introduced at his previous vehicle Hobson, which bought the Co-op's food manufacturing businesses.

The details come ahead of the CWS annual results, due to be published on Monday. As well as confirming a poor year for the business it is expected that they will reveal details of the retirement package of the previous chief executive, David Skinner. There is speculation that it could involve a payment of two years' salary plus continued use of his company Jaguar.

Though Mr Regan has missed the deadline for resolutions for the CWS annual meeting next month, it is possible that a supportive Co-operative member could propose a special meeting

to discuss the issue. It is thought that Lanica Trust would prefer its proposals to be discussed in a single-issue meeting rather than have its motion compete with a host of others at an agm. Lanica Trust also felt that using the annual meeting would have appeared hostile.

Though there have been suggestions that Mr Regan has the support of some of the regional societies, one chief executive of a small Co-op said yesterday: "We would strongly support the line taken by Graham Melmoth [the CWS chief executive] and oppose the approach that has been made. As mutuals without a fluctuating share price to distract us and through generations of accounting policies the movement has built up considerable internal reserves. But that wealth is not there to be plundered. We are the custodians of it. We are charged with cultivating it and handing it on to the next generation."

However, the chief executive added that he accepted that the movements fragmentation was a problem and that he would "strongly support" a merger of the CWS and Co-operative Retail Services, the other main Co-op division.

Mr Melmoth made similar comments to a group of Co-op managers in Solihull last Friday. He is quoted in the latest issue of *Co-operative News* as saying it is "time to heal our split personality". Though he repeated his tough stance on the Lanica approach he said the movement should make its assets work harder. He hinted at a moving together of the CWS and CRS though he did not use the term, "merger".

He said that if the two camps were to move closer they would form a stronger commercial proposition. Mr Melmoth added: "It is possible that the interesting diversion of Lanica over the last few weeks... will help to concentrate minds."



Pay bonanza: David Jarvis (left) and Peter George

Ionica chases BT with creation of 600 new jobs

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Ionica, the telephone operator that combines wireless technology with fixed phone lines, has announced a drive to create up to 600 jobs in Birmingham following what it claimed had been stronger-than-expected consumer demand.

The jobs, most of which are in customer support and sales operations, come before the planned launch of Ionica's service in Birmingham, due within weeks. Coverage has already been extended from East Anglia, where Ionica began its service last summer, across the East Midlands. The company aims to cover most of the UK, except Scotland, by 2002.

The new jobs, based in offices in the centre of Birmingham, will all be the equivalent of full-time posts, though the company said numbers employed may go beyond 600 if applicants wanted to join part-time.

The expansion will intensify pressure on British Telecom, the principal target of Ionica's assault on the domestic market. It uses radio signals to relay phone lines from the home to nearby base stations, bypassing BT's near-monopoly of local

exchange lines. Earlier this week BT announced plans to create a further 2,000 telephone marketing jobs as the competitive threat from rival operators has reached what many industry experts believe is critical mass.

Nigel Playford, chief executive, said: "We are only targeting BT customers. We are not marketing ourselves against the cable companies. The existence of cable has enabled us to create our own strategy which is hugely different."

Ionica offers a 15 per cent cut in call charges over BT and 20 per cent lower line rental bills. Other innovations include providing three separate numbers for every line, each with different ringing tones, to help family members to identify the destination of incoming calls.

Mr Playford claimed Ionica was connecting customers at the rate of 3,000 a month in the East Midlands, faster than the local cable company. So far more than 15,000 homes in East Anglia have switched to Ionica, mostly from BT, out of a potential 700,000 which can take the service.

The company says it is on course to float on the stock market this year.

Weinberg deals Pru a stake in St James's Place

Tom Stevenson
City Editor

Sir Mark Weinberg crystallised another fortune from the life assurance business yesterday, reversing the J Rothschild insurance company he founded six years ago into his quoted vehicle St James's Place Capital.

The 65-year-old, South African-born entrepreneur and Rothschild's two other founders will receive more than £2m each when they sell part of their combined £35m holding in the enlarged company to the Prudential.

The linked deals, which Sir

Mark described as the completion of a process that started with last year's separation of St James's life assurance interests managed and maintained a separate stock market listing.

It is the second time Sir Mark has grown and then cashed in on a life assurance business, having sold Hambro Life to BAT in the early 1980s. His personal stake in J Rothschild amounts to almost £12m. His co-founders, Mike Wilson and Keith Carby, have similar holdings.

Sir Mark said yesterday the catalyst for the complex deal was the recent £2.9bn takeover

by the Prudential of Scottish Amicable, which joined forces with St James's Place Capital in 1991 to form J Rothschild Assurance and remained a significant shareholder. The takeover meant the Pru's stake in St James rose from around 3.5 per cent to around 22 per cent.

By tendering for further shares it plans to take its holding to the maximum allowable under takeover panel rules without being forced to make a full offer.

Nine-month figures yesterday showed J Rothschild growing its life assurance business almost twice as fast as the rest of the

market. New business grew by 39 per cent last year compared with just 24 per cent for a comparable spread of Association of British Insurers members.

Mike Wilson, chief executive, said that outperformance reflected the high quality of Rothschild's sales force, where employees had an average 11 years' financial services experience and were required to have worked in the industry for at least three years before joining.

After rapid growth during its short existence, Rothschild now sells more new policies than Britannic and United Assurance

and two thirds as many as Abbey Life and Scottish Amicable itself.

Following the reverse takeover, about three-quarters of St James's Place's business will be represented by the J Rothschild operation, with the rest accounted for by Life Assurance Holding Corporation, a venture fund set up to buy and close down ailing life insurers, and Global Asset Management, an institutional fund manager.

On the basis of St James's closing share price yesterday of 131p, up 5.5p, the enlarged company will be valued at £562m.

Chancellor expected to hold rates

Diane Coyle
Economics Editor

The economic conditions give Kenneth Clarke strong grounds to resist increasing base rates at today's monetary meeting with the Governor of the Bank of England, while bequeathing to the next Chancellor the need for a post-election rise in the cost of borrowing.

Fresh figures yesterday showed a surprise drop in total industrial production in February masking a steady upward trend in its manufacturing component. Meanwhile the pound climbed above DM2.79, partly in the expectation that interest rates will go up next month.

With the likelihood that mortgage rates will rise when base rates are finally increased, election-related uncertainty is denting people's optimism about house prices, according to Barclays Bank.

Its monthly survey showed that levels of mortgage advances were still rising – in March they were 15 per cent up on a year earlier. But the proportion expecting house prices to rise has slipped from 69 per cent to 61 per cent.

"While the uncertainty will probably be short-lived, it is unfortunate that people are holding back at an ideal time to buy a home," said Jim Chadwick, marketing director at Barclays

Mortgages. The bank warned that demand for properties still far outstripped supply.

Official statistics showed that total industrial production dropped by 0.6 per cent in February. The warmer-than-usual weather was the culprit, with lower electricity and gas production and lower North Sea extraction.

Manufacturing output increased by 0.2 per cent during February, and its January increase was revised up to 0.5 per cent. Production is now growing 1.8 per cent year-on-year, the best since late 1995.

In the latest three-month period the production of both textiles and clothing and rubber

and plastic declined. The strongest sectors were metals and engineering, the latter very reliant on exports.

"The strength of domestic demand is offsetting the impact of the stronger pound on exports," said Jonathan Loyne, UK economist at HSBC Markets.

City economists remain cautious about the potential impact of the strong pound. "Manufacturers are by no means out of the woods," said Mr Loyne.

But even if industry does remain subdued, a majority of analysts think the strength of the rest of the economy means the cost of borrowing will have to go up after the election, possibly as early as 7 May.

BG and Ofgas at odds over MMC delay

Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

The rift between British Gas and the industry watchdog, Ofgas, appeared to deepen yesterday after the two sides offered sharply opposing explanations for a six-week delay to the Monopolies and Mergers Commission (MMC) investigation into price cuts proposed for the company's pipeline network, TransCo.

Ofgas said the MMC's report, which had been due to be handed over on 14 April, would not now be passed across until 31 May. It confirms indications last week of delays to the investigation, which were fuelled when Clare Spottiswoode, the regulator, was called to an additional hearing before the MMC's panel on Tuesday.

The MMC began its inquiry last October after British Gas, since renamed BG, rejected Ms Spottiswoode's proposals to cut about £30 off average gas bills from this month. According to BG this would slash TransCo's revenues by at least £400m a year. The company has warned it would have to make up to half TransCo's 20,000 workforce redundant and might not be able to pay dividends if the plans went through.

The delay suggests the report is unlikely to be published until the middle of June. It also means the decisions about implementing the MMC's findings could be one of the first tasks for a newly elected Labour government.

Last night Ofgas and BG disagreed about the reasons for the delay. Ofgas said it had agreed to the MMC's request to extend the investigation after the panel had received "extensive new information" which it needed to consider. An Ofgas spokesman added: "The new material has come from the two sides, both British Gas and ourselves. It's not just us."

Minutes later, however, BG emphatically denied that it had provided the MMC with any new material. "We are not going to comment on individual areas but if there was late information provided it was not by BG," said a spokesman. When questioned about the discrepancy, Ofgas said it stood by its earlier comments.

There was no indication about the precise nature of the new material. The crucial argument is over the size of TransCo's asset base for regulatory purposes and the scale of depreciation charges.

BG shares, which rose on the rumours last week, slipped 3p yesterday to 176p.

STOCK MARKETS									
Index	Close	Day's change	Change %	1996/97 High	1996/97 Low	Yield %	Dividend	Dividend Yield	Dividend Payout
FTSE 100	4292.30	+23.00	+0.5	4444.30	4055.60	3.76			
FTSE 250	4538.60	+20.90	+0.5	4729.40	4489.40	3.53			
FTSE 350	2116.60	+11.10	+0.5	2194.30	2017.90	3.71			
FTSE SmallCap	2290.93	+4.85	+0.2	2374.20	2178.29	3.04			
FTSE All-Share	2087.56	+10.37	+0.5	2183.94	1988.78	3.56			
New York	6611.05	+1.89	+0.0	7085.16	5932.94	1.97			
Tokyo	17703.37	-318.33	-1.8	22666.80	17303.65	0.891			
Hong Kong	12428.68	+28.11	+0.2	13868.24	12055.17	3.381			
Frankfurt	3359.46	+29.70	+0.9	3480.84	2848.77	1.611			

Source: FT Information

INTEREST RATES									
Short sterling					UK medium gilt				
1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	2 Year	1 Month	3 Month	6 Month	1 Year	2 Year
6.09	6.97	7.80	8.12	7.69	8.21				
US 5.78	6.56	6.89	6.58	7.10	6.85				
Japan 0.44	0.58	2.12	3.23						
Germany 3.16	3.25	5.89	6.45	6.69					

CURRENCIES									
£/\$					£/DM				
Yesterday	Today	Change	Year Ago	1996/97 High	Yesterday	Today	Change	Year Ago	1996/97 High
\$ London 1.6235	-0.01c	1.5250			£ London 0.6160	unch	0.6557		
\$ NY 1.6215	-0.02c	1.5215			£ NY 0.6187	+0.88	0.6572		
DM London 2.7915	+1.40p	2.2750			DM London 1.7197	+0.87p	1.4818		
¥ London 205.380	+0.54p	185.081			¥ London 126.520	+0.34	108.230		
₹ India 99.4	+0.3	83.9			₹ India 105.8	+0.3	96.4		

Source: Reuters

مكتبة من الأصيل



When it comes to the crunch and voters see their beloved NHS being run down, and the economy turns down so government borrowing starts to rise again, then we will get a tax-raising budget.

Whoever wins, taxes are going to have to rise

It couldn't be any plainer. As sure as eggs is eggs, whichever of the two main parties forms the next government, it would have to raise taxes or cut spending more than planned in order to keep borrowing to the "golden rule" level to which both parties have committed themselves.

That rule says the government will borrow no more than it would need to finance investment, and implies a deficit of around 1 per cent of GDP over time. With an underlying deficit of 2-2.5 per cent of GDP, this implies a fiscal tightening of £7-10bn.

What's more, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies made clear in its analysis yesterday, to meet the existing spending targets would buck the trend of 80 years of history. Government spending just does not grow that slowly in a modern economy, and the current plans are, frankly, incredible.

If taxes do not rise more than planned – and it is worth recalling that big tax increases via petrol and tobacco duties, higher air passenger duty, and a crackdown on tax evasion are already on the cards – it would mark the end of the welfare state as we know it. We will be topping up privately our pensions, healthcare, and spending on our children's education.

There are two conclusions the financial markets should draw from the IFS's sobering analysis. One, taxes will go up quite steeply after the election – not immediately, but at some point during the next parliament. When it comes to the crunch and voters see their beloved NHS being run down,

and the economy turns down so government borrowing starts to rise again, then we will get a tax-raising budget.

The second conclusion is that neither party is likely to be as tough as it pretends on borrowing, and the PSBR will not fall to zero by the turn of the century. Although there will need to be some reduction in the underlying structural deficit, neither Labour nor the Conservatives would struggle to eliminate it in practice.

None of this is the stuff of feelgood, so it is no surprise that the political parties themselves have not been spelling out the implications. But what is really odd about the election debate is how few people have cottoned on to how low UK taxes are by international standards, until the IFS pointed it out yesterday. Although government borrowing is too high, we have plenty of scope to close the gap and fund a bit more expenditure by paying more tax. After what happened to Neil Kinnock and John Smith at the time of the last election, nobody, apart from maybe Paddy Ashdown, is going to admit this. Almost everyone, it seems, is fixated by the totem of tax-cutting – and look what a hole that's got us into.

Ladbroke's incentives are a good bet

The annual accounts season is well and truly upon us. It is perhaps a comment on our times that they are read these days

more for what they tell us about the earnings of top executives than the affairs of the companies they are meant to represent. The latest case of "excess" comes from Ladbroke Group, where a long-term incentive plan has caused the earnings of the chief executive, Peter George, to rocket from £481,000 in 1995 to an astonishing £1.3m last year.

Approximately half of this sum comes from the LTIP, which appears, from the little we are told about it in the annual accounts, to be based solely on the performance of Ladbroke's share price. Fortunately for Ladbroke's executive directors, the plan was set up when Ladbroke's share price was on the ropes. That's helped Ladbroke to become the 23rd best performing share in the FTSE 100 share index over the past three years and apparently justifies this whopping great payout.

Such are the delights of these Greenbury-approved LTIPs, however, that Mr George would have received something like £160,000 even if Ladbroke had underperformed the index and the company come in at number 75. Some incentive. Subject to shareholder approval, the accounts say, the remuneration committee has decided to introduce modifications to the scheme this year "to make the achievement of reward more demanding".

Good of them, but it's not clear it will make much difference. For the remuneration committee receives "regular advice from external independent consultants", you see, and they say that executive pay

should be in line with Ladbroke's leading competitors and "other companies which operate internationally". Thus is the going rate for the job perpetually bid upwards.

A slice of the steam age disappears

Another little slice of our industrial heritage passed away yesterday as Siemens went to Newcastle and picked up a steam turbine generating business to go with the silicon chip plant it already boasts. Now that the Germans have picked Parsons clean, this presumably leaves the rump of the company to slip quietly into the night when Newcastle finishes work on its two remaining Indian power station orders early next year.

When Britain had an empire and Sir Charles Parsons revolutionised naval warfare by inventing the steam turbine, the North-east truly ruled the world as well as powering it. Sadly, times have long since moved on. Not even Rolls-Royce's ill-starred attempt to wring some synergy out of making gas turbines for jumbo jets as well as power stations could save Parsons.

Last year it booked a meagre £150m of turbine sales compared with the £3bn clocked up by its new German owners. Jürgen Gehrels, chief executive of Siemens in the UK, kindly attributes this to Parsons' lack of global reach. But the truth is it could not even pick up business in its own back yard,

the dash for gas by the UK electricity industry being realised largely with kit supplied from Germany.

Apart from Mr Gehrels' soft spot for Newcastle – he even produced a football shirt at yesterday's press conference – it is hard to see why Siemens was so keen to snap up any of Parsons. True, it gets its hands on the juicy spares business from all those Parsons' customers dotted around the Commonwealth. But it also inherits the millstone of Parsons' under-utilised manufacturing facilities – when capacity is something the world steam turbine industry is hardly short of.

Palatable ways to raise revenue

The Institute for Fiscal Studies has always had a particular talent for getting to and articulating the heart of the matter. Its pamphlet on Labour's windfall profits tax is no exception. "The most troubling aspect of the tax," says the Institute, "is that it demonstrates the fact that in order to raise revenue, political parties increasingly seek to conjure up new taxes on targets they believe will be palatable to the electorate rather than being able to raise revenue from the existing tax structure, which would be more coherent economically and also more transparent". Quite so. The IFS might reasonably have added that we can expect a lot more where that came from.

Siemens takes over parts of Parsons

Michael Harrison

A thousand engineering jobs were salvaged yesterday after the German engineering giant Siemens paid Rolls-Royce £30m to take over parts of its Parsons steam turbine generation business in Newcastle.

The takeover will increase Siemens workforce in the North-east to more than 2,000, making it one of the most important employers in the area. It already has a silicon chip plant in the North-east which will start deliveries in August.

But the deal will also mark the demise of Parsons – one of the most illustrious names in British industrial history, founded in 1889 by Sir Charles Parsons, the inventor of the steam turbine.

Siemens is to take on Parsons' spares business and some of its manufacturing and engineering operations employing a total of 880 people. A further 120 Parsons employees are being relocated to other Rolls-Royce divisions in the North-east.

But the future of the 300 employees working on Parsons' two remaining power station contracts in India looks bleak. If they are made redundant when the contracts are complete early next year then 1,100 workers will have lost their jobs since Rolls announced it was pulling out of the heavy steam turbine business last summer at a cost of £248m.

Barney McGill, works convenor at Parsons, said he was delighted at the announcement though he remained disappointed that more jobs had not been saved. He said: "This was a good day on the whole. There was a real possibility the company could have been lost forever so we're delighted it's been saved. The negatives are that we've lost so many jobs, but even the people who've been made redundant have said they



Jobs salvaged: Jürgen Gehrels, Siemens chief executive (left) and Horst Münstermann of Siemens Power Generation

hope above all that Parsons carries on."

Siemens intends to use the Parsons factory to manufacture components for its main steam turbine generator factory in Mülheim, Germany and parts for existing customers.

But it will never again manufacture steam turbines bearing the Parsons name and Parsons Power Generation Systems is being subsumed into Siemens' existing UK power generation sales arm to form a new company, Siemens Power Generation.

Jürgen Gehrels, chief executive of Siemens in the UK, said he felt sad that one of the "pioneers of power generation" would be no more. But he added: "We are a global player in power generation and Parsons wasn't, that was one of its weaknesses. I hope the name will not disappear completely. I hope we can use it in some form."

Mr Gehrels also cautioned that there was no absolute guarantee of a job for any of the workers it was taking on. "We have not taken on 880 people to make them redundant but the only way to guarantee jobs is to improve competitiveness all the time and we have a long way to go in Newcastle."

The turnover of the business being taken over by Siemens was £60m last year compared with Parsons' total sales of £150m. In total there are 57,000 megawatts of Parsons-built turbines in operation around the world.

Although Siemens is far larger in power generation with 150,000 megawatts of installed capacity, sales last year of DM8bn and new orders totalling DM9bn, Mr Gehrels said that Parsons' customer base would give it access to new markets.

Despite the fact that there is overcapacity in the heavy steam turbine generation market, he also said that Siemens needed the manufacturing facilities that Parsons has in the North-east.

IN BRIEF

Procter & Gamble buys Tambrands

Procter & Gamble, the personal hygiene giant, has acquired Tambrands, manufacturers of Tampax tampons. P&G is to buy Tambrands for £1.85bn (£1.15bn) or \$50 a share. Tambrands has 44 per cent of the US tampon market and its Tampax brand is marketed in 150 countries. It employs 2,600 people globally. Neither side would comment on possible lay-offs. P&G, based in Ohio, makes Oil of Ulay, Pampers nappies and Pantene shampoo.

Fortune 500 firms leap ahead

The combined profits of the Fortune 500 companies leaped 23 per cent last year while their revenues rose by 8.3 per cent. General Motors stayed number one, with annual revenues of \$168.5bn (£105.3bn). Second was Ford with \$146.99bn and third Exxon with \$119.4bn. The rankings, published annually by *Fortune* magazine, help explain the rise of US stocks until recent weeks. Among the firms, 305 reported increased profits last year, four-fifths of which said earnings grew faster than revenues.

Receivers in at millennium adviser

Administrative receivers were appointed at Kendell, the building services, architectural and town-planning group acting as professional adviser to the Millennium Commission Panel. Shares in Kendell were suspended on 25 March and will continue to be suspended. The company, formerly known as YRM, reported losses last year of £2.4m. It has not made a profit since 1992. It was hoping to benefit from savings after shedding its property surplus and return to profitability in May.

Smiths Industries expects upturn

Smiths Industries chairman Sir Roger Hurn yesterday forecast a strong upturn in the military and civil aircraft markets as he suggested the group would generate "real growth in earnings over the years ahead". Pre-tax profits rose from £69.5m to £84.2m in the six months to 1 February. *Investment column, page 24*

Rolls-Royce sales soaring in UK

Vickers said sales of Rolls-Royce cars in the first quarter to March 1997 were up 13 per cent year-on-year at 446. Sales in the UK were up 49 per cent to 236 cars. Sales in the Americas and Japan were up 2 and 7 per cent respectively. However, sales were down in the Middle East and Africa by 32 per cent, and in continental Europe by 17 per cent.

Anthea Cudworth

Contrary to the statement in yesterday's story headed "When the boss's daughter is not assured a job", we wish to make it clear that Anthea Cudworth, daughter of John Cudworth, the chairman of United Assurance Group plc, left the company in December 1996 of her own free will, not as a result of the merger between Refuge Group and United Friendly. She had already accepted a place at the Australian Graduate Business School at the University of New South Wales in Sydney to take a two-year MBA course and took this up last February. We apologise for any embarrassment caused.

Channel 5 pays £88m for films

Rob Brown
Media Editor

Channel 5, committed to screening a feature film every night, splashed out £88m yesterday for two years' worth of Warner Brothers' forthcoming productions – almost as much as its entire first year programming budget.

ITV also went to the movies yesterday, beating off both CS and the BBC to clinch a multi-million pound deal with Universal Studios, which has traditionally dealt with the BBC.

The contract – the first between ITV and Universal for eight years – gives Britain's biggest commercial network the right to premiere 32 future and current releases including *Twister*, *Dante's Peak* and *Jim Carrey's Liar Liar* on British terrestrial television two years from now.

In the meantime, it can screen former hits such as *Back to the Future*, *Beethoven*, *Kindergarten Cop* and *Jaws*.

ITV was also in the bidding for the Warner package, but walked away after forcing up the price for its new fledgling rival, whose entry into the programme acquisition market is causing galloping inflation in this sphere.

Channel 5's initial annual programme budget is only

Aer Lingus looking for overseas partners

Michael Harrison

Aer Lingus, the state-owned Irish flag carrier, expects to have identified potential strategic alliance partners by the end of this year in a move which could see equity stakes in the airline being offered to overseas carriers.

The move, which will in effect mean the partial privatisation of Aer Lingus, could result in up to 49 per cent of the airline being surrendered by the Irish government.

Bernie Cahill, Aer Lingus's chairman, said yesterday that the airline's improved financial situation had enhanced the prospects of finding suitable partners.

He was speaking at Aer Lingus reported an increase in pre-tax profits from £18.2m to £41.7m last year. The sharp rise was largely due to a £19m fall in interest charges and exceptional gains in 1996 compared with one-off charges the previous year.

Gary McGann, Aer Lingus's chief executive, said it was unlikely that the airline would have signed alliances and given up equity stakes by the end of the year.

But he added: "I am confident that we will have a clear proposition to put to the government." The airline, he said, was looking at alliances in both the US and Europe.

Hansen hired as football scout

Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

A City-backed investment vehicle which is seeking a stock market flotation later this month has recruited Alan Hansen, former Liverpool and Scotland international, to scout for a Premiership football club to buy.

Hansen has been appointed as a non-executive director of Soccer Investments, a shell company backed by City institutions. It is seeking an attractive football club willing to enter into a reverse takeover. If such an opportunity does not appear, the group will liquidate and the backers' cash returned.

It hopes to use a £10m cash "carrot" and the promise of a flotation to lure a Premiership club into a reverse takeover.

Soccer Investments is in talks with two Premiership clubs. As the company has appointed a Newcastle-based broker and a Leeds-based public relations company, it is possible one target could be Middlesbrough.

The Teeside club is third from bottom in the Premiership but is in the semi-finals of the FA Cup and the final of the Coca-Cola Cup.

Vinay Bedi, of the company's broker, Wise Speke, said: "Soccer Investments has given itself two years to find an attractive football club willing to enter into a reverse takeover. If such an opportunity does not appear, the group will liquidate and the backers' cash returned."

The backers are believed to be blue chip City firms as well as prominent footballing individuals. The directors of the acquired club would receive shares in Soccer Investments for their stake. The £10m would be injected into the club.

There has been a flurry of football club flotations and opportunities for deals in the Premiership are diminishing rapidly. In recent weeks Mosaic Investments has taken over Bolton Wanderers and Newcastle United has taken a listing while Sheffield Wednesday is raising funds via a placing.

Soccer Investments said Alan Hansen's selection of prospective clubs would centre on player capabilities, strength of squad and the management.



Alan Hansen: Looking out for a football club to buy

Chemical industry calls to delay start of EMU

Michael Harrison

Leaders of Britain's chemicals industry yesterday called for a delay in the launch of a single European currency in 1999 but said that when economic and monetary union did proceed the UK should be in the first wave.

The call from the Chemical Industries Association came as its annual survey of investment intentions showed that up to a quarter of chemical companies would cut back on spending if Britain stayed outside EMU.

Elliot Finer, director-general of the CIA, said the chemical industry supported a single currency, believing it would save around £200m a year in transaction costs, aid completion of the single market and improve Europe's competitiveness.

But he said: "We have always believed that it is more important to get the transition right than to adhere to a predetermined timetable. Unfortunately it looks as if there has not yet been sufficient movement in the economies of prospective EMU members to allow a single currency to be a success. We therefore believe that it would be in Europe's best interests to delay the start of the project until there has been the real convergence and increased flexibility a single currency will require."

Mr Finer conceded that a delay in the timetable could damage the political momentum behind EMU. But he argued it was more important to achieve real convergence in inflation and employment rates and output per head than for the EMU timetable to be driven by "political machismo".

That, he said, would do more damage to Europe's competitiveness because if countries went in when their economies were not ready there would be huge pressure for state aid handouts to compensate.

However, he said that when EMU did start, it was vital to the long-term health of the UK chemical industry that Britain was a member. If it was outside the core group of participating states, Britain would lose out on investment.

Industries within the core group would also find it less attractive to trade with those who stayed outside EMU.

The survey of investment intentions shows that spending is likely to remain subdued for the fifth year running. The CIA's members are forecasting only a 5 per cent rise in investment in real terms this year to £2.3bn. In 1996 investment actually fell marginally in real terms to £2.15bn despite predictions at the start of the year that it would increase by 14 per cent. Spending last year was 23 per cent below its peak in the late 1980s.

The subdued outlook for investment reflected worries about interest rates increasing after the election and the general sluggishness of demand in Europe, notably Germany, combined with doubts about the launch of EMU.

The survey also highlighted concerns about skills shortages, with companies complaining about a lack of good quality graduates. Chemical companies were also concerned that electricity prices and costs of complying with environmental legislation would hold back investment.

market report / shares

Drug shares offer antidote to election boredom

MARKET REPORT

DEREK PAIN

stock market reporter of the year

Data Bank

FTSE 100	4292.3	+23.0
FTSE 250	4539.6	+20.9
FTSE 350	2116.6	+11.1
SEAQ VOLUME	699.7m shares	
42,162 bargains		
Gifts Index	93.83	+0.23

Share spotlight



Bored stiff by the election and uncertain about New York the stock market seems determined to get hooked on drugs. Much of the recent action has been among the market's disparate collection of health shares with some turning in highly volatile performances. At first the bio-babes attracted the action. In the past few days the big players, particularly SmithKline Beecham, have captured the market's imagination. Reawakened US interest is thought to be the SB spur. The shares rose 22.5p to 915.5p in often brisk trading; they were 867.5p a week ago. Zeneca was another in demand, up 37p at 1,804.5p, and Glaxo Wellcome threw off its US legal setback with a modest 7.5p gain to 1,088.5p. Shield Diagnostic, which prompted the current stampede with encouraging trials for its heart disease detection

system, had a roller-coaster session with a 32.5p gain surrendered into a 7.5p loss at 662.5p. The group has replaced stockbroker Greig Middleton with UBS and should benefit from the clearance of a stock overhaul. Apex Ventures, a venture capitalist and one of Shield's early backers, has been dipping shares into the market but now appears to have sold much of its remaining stake. Last week it had approaching 1.5 million shares (7.7 per cent). A 1.2 million deal at 640p was almost certainly an Apex sale although it is not clear where the shares ended up. At one time Apex had 19.1 per cent of Shield which touched 805p earlier this year. One pharmaceutical share which has conspicuously missed the drug party is ML Laboratories. It fell 2.5p to 187.5p, a 12-month low. In 1995 the shares touched



468.5p. Shortly afterwards chairman Kevin Leech and related interests sold 13.75 million shares for £55m. He still has more than 50 per cent. The ML fall from grace is even more surprising as it has occurred as the company moved into the black - an exceedingly rare event for a fledgling drug group. Its £5.45m profit should, if stockbroker Panmure Gordon has got its sums right, be followed by £12m this year and more than £100m at the turn of the century. In last year's trading Footsie managed a 23-point gain to 4,292.3 after briefly going

through 4,300. Allied Domecq was a major blue chip casualty. Evidence its Teacher's Scotch whisky, once the second-best selling brand in the country, had suffered a sobering 26 per cent sales decline left the shares nursing a 6.5p hangover at 437.5p. Laura Ashley, the clothing and home furnishings retailer, was at one time up 16.5p as determined buying was evident for the second day running. The price closed 5p higher at 149.5p. Year's figures are due later this month. RTV was another in demand. In brisk trading the shares were switched on 8.5p to 302.5p. In the past few

weeks they have edged away from a 280.5p low. United News & Media has 29.9 per cent of the Welsh broadcaster. Another frisson of excitement went through the insurance broking sector as David Herro, the Chicago fund manager who achieved a sort of fleeting fame at the old Saatchi & Saatchi, lifted his Oakmark International's stake in Sedgwick to just above 3 per cent. Sedgwick edged forward 1.5p to 126p and Willis Corroon, regarded as its most likely partner, stirred 1.5p to 156.5p. Mr Herro achieved prominence here when his actions prompted the departure of the Saatchi brothers from the advertising group - they ditched the business because it had struggled and its shares are below the level touched earlier in this decade. Rolls-Royce, finally settling

the sale of its Parsons operation to Siemens of Germany for £30m, gained 2p to 244p. Antenor, developing a revolutionary gearbox, motorised 13p to 116.5p and was then suspended. The company hinted a deal was near. On Olex Convey Diamonds & Gold opened at 55p. Thomas Jordan, the mini-conglomerate which trebled profits to £861,000, rose 7p to 68.5p. Former Suter chief, David Abell, is involved in a shareholder revolt. What appeared to be coded profits caution put the skids under Henlys, the buses and coach maker. The shares fell 27.5p to 479p after the group talked about the coach and bus division's profits being "weighed towards the second half". The garage side was performing up to expectations. Dana Petroleum gushed 3.5p higher to 26p on talk of an Enterprise Oil strike. **Bridgeport, which lost £3.4m in 1995, should have managed a small profit last year but, following two takeovers, may top £1m this year putting the shares on prospective earnings of 9.5. It has almost checked out of leisure to concentrate on distribution. For long it has had a bathroom fittings business and has acquired two car accessory distributors bringing in the Boss brand. Bridgeport still owns Stocks Hotel at Birmingham which is in the books at £6m and could be sold. The shares are 22p.**

Alcoholic Beverages

Asahi

Beck's

Carlsberg

Heineken

Kaiser

King

Miller

Orkla

Pilse

Sankey

Stout

Thorn

Watson

Wolfe

Yates

Banks, Merchant

Barclays

Bank of Scotland

Bank of Ireland

Bank of London

Bank of Montreal

Bank of New York

Bank of Paris

Bank of Spain

Bank of Sweden

Bank of Switzerland

Bank of Tokyo

Bank of West

Bank of York

Bank of Zaire

Bank of Zimbabwe

Bank of Australia

Bank of Canada

Bank of China

Bank of Denmark

Bank of France

Bank of Germany

Bank of Greece

Bank of Hong Kong

Bank of India

Bank of Italy

Bank of Japan

Bank of Korea

Bank of Luxembourg

Bank of Mexico

Bank of Netherlands

Bank of Norway

Bank of Portugal

Bank of Russia

Bank of Singapore

Bank of South Africa

Bank of Sweden

Bank of Switzerland

Bank of Taiwan

Bank of Thailand

Bank of United Kingdom

Bank of United States

Bank of Venezuela

Bank of West Indies

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sport

Tomba and Meehan on the upgrade

Racing

GREG WOOD

Twenty-one runners stood their ground yesterday at the latest declaration stage for the Whitbread Gold Cup at Sandown, which to most punters will mean two things. First, there is at least one decent steeplechase to look forward to before the jumpers shuffle off to their summer quarters, but also, since Whitbread day on 26 April features the Thresher Classic Trial, a serious undercard, that serious re-education in the merits of the leading members of the three-year-old generation can be delayed no longer.

Indeed, the start of the major Classic Trial cycle is less than a week away, with the Craven

meeting at Newmarket due to open next Tuesday, in France the run-in to the Guineas starts at Maisons-Laffitte tomorrow with the Prix d'Europe, for colts, and the Prix de la Forêt, for fillies. In this last year's Cheveley Park Stakes winner, Pas De Repose, will start her build-up to the 1,000 Guineas at Newmarket 4 May.

Criquette Head, the filly's trainer, wins the Imprudence, which returns to Maisons-Laffitte from now-defunct Evry - with such regularity that most other trainers have long since decided to leave her to it. So just three rivals, Psylla, Imia and Barnata, will line up against Pas De Repose tomorrow.

It will be a major surprise if Pas De Repose does not confirm her reservation on the trip

to Newmarket, and anyone who feels she is likely to become Mme Head's fourth winner of the fillies' Classic might do well to step into the ante-post market today at odds of around 8-1.

The second trial on the card, the Djebel, was won two years ago by French-trained, two-year-old, and the Djebel might offer a preliminary guide as to whether that dominance will be carried over to the Classic generation, with two British runners travelling to take on a four-strong home team led by Alpha Plus (André Fabre) and Nombres Premier (Alain du Royer-Dupre).

Fantastic Fellow, trained by Clive Brittain, goes on trial for the Poule d'Essai des Poulains (French 2,000 Guineas), while Brian Meehan's Tomba has the German equivalent on his agenda.

Meehan, a growing force in the training ranks whose Lambourn stable is now home to an 80-strong team, 50 of which are two-year-olds, is unequivocal



Meehan: Still improving

about Tomba's chance tomorrow. "He'd be one of our better three-year-olds," the trainer said yesterday, "and he's going to France because we think he'll win."

Victory would certainly not be a surprise, since Tomba improved throughout his busy seven-race campaign last season, which concluded with victory in a Listed event at Evry, while Meehan's string has been in good form from the first day of the last season, when he secured the juvenile Bludge Dancer to win the Brocklesley Stakes at Doncaster.

"It's hard going," Meehan said, "you've always got to keep improving, but we've consistently done okay and we're all enjoying it."

So much so, in fact, that he

Irish and Scots in 'greatest' game

Cricket

Kuala Lumpur is the unlikely setting for the most crucial match in Scotland's and Ireland's history today as they play each other for the third and final time in the 1999 World Cup.

Scotland's 72-run defeat against Bangladesh in the ICC Trophy yesterday set up the tie that neither side wanted. Both teams, who are staying in the same hotel in the Malaysian capital, hoped to see the other progress through the qualifying tournament. Now, only the winners will join cricket's elite in England in two years' time.

"This will be the most significant game ever for Scottish cricket," Alex Ritchie, the general secretary of the British Cricket Union, said. "But it is a great shame that we have to meet Ireland."

The Irish lost to Kenya on Monday, while Scotland's struggle to reach the final lasted two days because of rain. Bangladesh closed their 50-over innings on 244 for 7 and their powerful bowling dismissed the Scots for 171.

Bangladesh's qualification, whether or not they win Saturday's final against Kenya, sparked the biggest celebrations in the country's capital, Dhaka, since independence in 1971. Crowds waving flags and chanting "victory for the Tigers" joined street parties amid fireworks, band music and paint being hurled in all directions.

The players, meanwhile, can look forward to a car, mobile phone and life-long health care from a grateful government on their return.

ICC Trophy (Kuala Lumpur): Semi-final: Bangladesh 244 for 7 (Ireland 171 for 8). Final: Bangladesh 225 for 2 (Kenya 171 for 8).

Third win in four legs for Golding

Sailing

STUART ALEXANDER

Posting his third win out of four legs, Mike Golding yesterday took Group 4 across the finish line in Cape Town to extend his overall lead in the BT Challenge and complete the 6,300 miles from Sydney in 37 days, 23 hours, five minutes and five seconds.

In second place and just 20 minutes behind was Chris Tibbs, making up for the huge disappointment of Concord being dismantled on the second leg from Rio de Janeiro in Wellington.

Third was the man who is still second overall, Simon Walker, whose Toshiba was 4hr 6min 25sec behind Golding. He was then held up for a further hour and a half as a Russian 5.5m Frigate was stuck in the entrance to Victoria and Alfred waterfalls. Fourth was expected to be Commercial Union, fifth Motorola and sixth Save the Children.

An award for outstanding seamanship, only the fifth time it has been made, was yesterday given to Britain's Pete Goss by the Royal Ocean Racing Club Commodore, Terry Robinson. Goss turned back in heavy seas and winds at Christmas to rescue Raphael Dinelli, a fellow competitor in the Vendée Globe singlehanded non-stop round-the-world race.

TODAY'S FIXTURES

Football
 EUROPEAN CUP: Bayern Munich (17.30) vs Arsenal (19.45).
 PREMIER LEAGUE: Tottenham (12.30) vs Manchester United (1.45).
 CHAMPIONS LEAGUE: Tottenham (12.30) vs Manchester United (1.45).
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Other sports
 SWIMMING: European Championships (19.45).
 BOWLS: English Men's Championship (19.45).
 TENNIS: Wimbledon (19.45).

Hall leads McCoy back to the winner's circle

The champion jockey, Tony McCoy, finally got back among the winners after Diamond Hall cruised away with the bumper at Chesham yesterday. The Ulsterman had earlier drawn a blank on four Martin Pipe-trained favourites on his first day back at the office since being kept out for three weeks as a result of concussion.

"It's good to get a winner af-

ter four beaten favourites and I would think Mr Pipe is tearing his hair out," a relieved McCoy said. "It would have been an understatement to say I would have been really sick if I had to leave the course without a winner."

McCoy now hopes for an injury-free run up to the end of the season to enable him to land the jockeys' championship for the second successive year. "I had hoped to be back in the saddle of winners, but I was off for the past three weeks."

At Ripon, Bold Woods grilly prevented John Gosden securing his fourth successive win in the Gallop Stakes. Gosden's Handsome Ridge, owned by the footballer David Platt, had been sent off 1-2 to maintain the

WILTON

HYPERION
 2.20 Gadge 2.50 Barroco 3.20 TROPICAL BEACH 3.50 Riky Whisky 4.20 Nishimura 4.50 Turgenov (nb)
 GOING: Soft (Good to Soft in places).
 STALLS: 50c - for sale: 1m - 1m50c, 1m50c - 1m50c, 1m50c - 1m50c.

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FOLKESTONE

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GILLINGHAM UNITED STAKES (CLASS F) £3,300 added 50c

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sport

Last Monday's match was so inept that it introduced impartial observers to the effect of mistaking Valium for coffee sweetener

It should be pretty obvious to everyone who watches football in the Premier League that there is a great deal of room for technical improvement. If not, take an eye test. Shop around for old videos.

This, more, or less, is what the Leeds United manager, George Graham, stated on Sky Television last Monday following his team's goalless draw with Blackburn Rovers, a match so inept that it introduced impartial observers to the effect of mistaking Valium for coffee sweetener. Frustrated in his attempts to build on the sound defence he has put in place, Graham said that there is too much money chasing to little home-grown quality. "The problem drives you abroad, and I have been all over Europe this season," he said.

From the looks on the faces of Sky's presenter, Richard Keys, and its analyst, Andy Gray, you could imagine that they were braced for a blast down the line from headquarters. After all, allowing managers to emphasise deficiencies in English football is way out of sync with the marketing philosophy laid down by Rupert Murdoch.

In Sky's manual of disinformation – and this applies equally to coverage of boxing – there is no such thing as a thoroughly bad performance. If this is also true of the terrestrial channels (ITV is irritatingly partisan, when matches involve foreign opposition) Sky carries it to ludicrous proportions. A bad game is less than a good game; a good game becomes tremendous. Simple

passes that any journeyman pro should be able to perform are acclaimed as evidence of burgeoning standards; commonplace ball skills as proof of international equality.

Football continues to boom but there is no guarantee that the trend is permanent. The importance in Graham's remarks is, then, that they raised questions about the recent influx of foreign players. Perhaps the most pertinent were that clubs must invest in the development of players and chairman should be more accountable for issues like the present controversy over fixture congestion.

It is difficult to support Alex Ferguson's plea for an extension to the season but in view of Manchester



KEN JONES

United's probable commitments where was the club's chief executive, Martin Edwards, when the Premier League conceded, ridiculously, to an Easter-free programme?

Who calls the tune anyway? The Chelsea chairman, Ken Bates was

incensed by the Easter cancellation and has suggested that a breakaway by leading European clubs from their national associations is possible. This suggestion is highly improbable. Nevertheless it indicates considerable dissatisfaction in club circles.

On the blunkered basis of lost revenue an odds-on bet is that the majority of Premier League chairmen are vehemently opposed to the proposition of an 18-club Premiership, which would ease the strain on players and has been suggested by John Barnwell of the League Managers' Association.

None of the chairmen, I'm sure, agreed with João Havelange, who is shortly to step down as president of the game's governing body, Fifa, when he said there is now too much

professional football. "It has become a problem," he said, "because everyone – directors, managers, coaches, players and doctors – want to profit from football's popularity."

Money, on a ridiculous scale in some cases, persuades foreign players to turn out in the Premier League. And money pouring in from Sky helps to create an inflated market, transfer fees out of all proportion to ability and unforeseen difficulties in bringing young players forward.

This is what Howard Wilkinson has taken on as the Football Association's technical director, and what occupied Graham's thoughts on Monday. Without financial input from the clubs where is the next

generation of players coming from?

This is not something that television can be expected to embrace with any enthusiasm. In their garden the roses are always blooming. Thundersclap trailers, marvellous matches, individual shortcomings glossed over by the mambo jumbo of analysis and reference to vague roles in the tactical scheme of things.

Even allowing for the threat Blackburn are still under, last Monday's match was awful. In not making that point, stressing instead the effects of pace and congestion, Sky's employees did football a disservice and insulted the intelligence of viewers. Seems that the truth does not sit easy with them.

61st US MASTERS: Faldo opens his title defence alongside the young pretender as the inevitable drama starts to unfold today

Woods has drive to fulfil ambition

ANDY FARRELL

reports from Augusta

Who needs Hollywood scriptwriters, anyway? Why would Augusta National throw some of their \$7m (£4.4m) annual profits in that direction when Bobby Jones's Annual Invitation Tournament throws up Oscar material year after year. Somehow, it always seems to live up to the hype.

At the 61st US Masters, the storylines are thicker on the ground than the dogwood. Can Greg Norman return a conquering hero after his ultimate Masters disaster a year ago? Will Nick Faldo, the English grinder who caught the Shark in '96, win back-to-back titles for the second time. Will a footsore Jose Maria Olazabal, the 1994 champion, continue his sensational comeback from an 18-month break? But, above all, how will Tiger Woods, to many Americans the boy-man who invented golf as a mass-interest sport, fare in his first Masters as a professional?

Last Friday, at the Isleworth course in Orlando where he now lives, hardly a Mickey Mouse lay-out. Woods shot a 59 in a practice round with Mark O'Meara. He was 10 under for 10 holes and failed to birdie two of the par-fives. "Actually, it was disappointing," Woods said.

Having finished 31st, his worst result of the year, at the Players' Championship, Woods spent last week practising hard. He tightened up his swing and spent hours on the putting green honing his stroke for the treacherous Augusta greens. "I'm rolling the ball better than I have at any time," he added.

Woods has played Augusta twice as an amateur without particular success when his preparation time was then taken up with college exams. "The

big difference is that I am tournament tough now," he said. But many are sceptical that on a course where there has been only one first-time winner (Fuzzy Zoeller in 1979) since the first playing, that Woods has sufficient knowledge of the particularities of the place to be ultimately successful.

"There is a learning curve to playing Augusta and a discipline to playing the course," said Faldo, who had six attempts before claiming his first Green Jacket. "Where to hit the ball, where not to hit the ball, how to hit the ball. You have to keep control. It's not impossible, but I think experience does well."

The thought of winning his third Masters is not a problem for Woods. "Is it realistic? I

AUGUSTA CARD					
Hole	Yards	Par	Hole	Yards	Par
1	400	4	10	485	4
2	555	5	11	455	4
3	380	4	12	455	4
4	205	3	13	485	5
5	435	4	14	405	4
6	180	3	15	590	5
7	360	4	16	520	5
8	535	5	17	405	4
9	435	4	18	405	4
Out 3,465		36	in 3,460		36
Par 72			Total 6,925		

think so," he said. "I don't know if anyone else does. Whether I win at my third try or my 50th try, it doesn't matter. You've got to be at a level where you feel confident in your abilities physically and, more importantly, mentally."

"I have learnt the hard way on this course. You have to be patient with your iron play and the fairways are a lot narrower than you might think. In order to get to some of the pins, you have to be on certain sides of the fairways."

Woods's length off the tees is his biggest advantage and on Tuesday he drove the green at the 360-yard third. Yesterday, playing with the twice champi-

on Ben Crenshaw, he was 40 yards short of the green at the downhill 11th and 60 yards short at the uphill 400-yard 17th. No wonder the Augusta officials are being coy about moving back the tee at the first, still rated a 400-yard hole by the scorecard, by six yards to bring the bunker on the right more into play.

The greens, however, are already hard and fast, and Woods has been given no favours by the draw, which traditionally pairs the reigning US Amateur champion with the defending champion. "There's nobody out there stronger mentally. The only way to beat Faldo round here is to hit better golf shots," Colin Montgomerie said. "He won last year's Masters by birdieing the 17th on Saturday to get to play with Norman on the last day."

Away from the high profile end of the market, there are some dangerous floaters. Ernie Els, the '94 US Open champion, and the Open champion, Tom Lehman, are two, while the last three winners on the US Tour – Phil Mickelson, Steve Elkington and Brad Faxon – do have the vital ingredient of confidence.

The rest of the European challenge is a mystery. Seve Ballesteros has turned to Woods's coach, Butch Harmon in an attempt to make his first cut of the season. Ian Woosnam made a delayed arrival from Barbados after an airline computer mistake on Monday and has had treatment on his back, although Sam Torrance's wrist has recovered. Lee Westwood is as wide-eyed as a 23-year-old should be on his Masters debut, while Warren Bladon, the British Amateur champion, has gone into debt to afford the £7,000 trip.

Montgomerie's best finish in five attempts is 17th, but he says this could be the year. No, really? "I'm looking forward to competing for the first time. Europe's No 1 said, 'I have not come well so far. I've hit half-decent shots which I hoped to get away with and didn't. You can't do that here. I have never putted better on these greens in practice.'"

Faxon, a specialist on the greens, helped Montgomerie on Tuesday, and others regularly asked the Rhode Islander for advice. But he was surprised when Woods came to him. "What was the problem? 'I don't seem to hole puts until the back nine on Sundays,' Woods said to Faxon's incredulity. If he is in contention on the back nine this Sunday we are going to have some fun."



Brimful of confidence: Jesper Parnevik (right) points the way to his caddy from the 10th tee in practice for the US Masters Photograph: Reuter

Hats off to Parnevik, golf's oddball

A strange Swede in a funny cap can make a lasting impression on the US Masters. Andy Farrell reports from Augusta

South Palm Beach in Florida, has done include wearing battery-powered strobe light glasses to help synchronise neural firings in his brain and consulting a Russian psychic who had worked with Mikhail Gorbachev.

"I always like to find new ways to improve, not only to improve my game, but to improve personally," Parnevik said. The hat thing started when he was practising in Florida before the 1992 European season and wanted to get a bit of a tan. He found his eyeliner was not distracted by the peak of his cap and started to hole more puts. In his next tournament, Parnevik got into a play-off which Seve Ballesteros won at the seventh extra hole.

Parnevik has won three times on the European Tour and each time by a stretch but, typically, would like to win in a tight, dramatic finish. At the Lancome Trophy last September, in which he beat Colin Montgomerie by five shots, he lit up a cigar on

the last hole to win a bet with a friend despite the fact that he does not smoke.

The price of sponsoring the underside of Parnevik's cap

peaked could have gone sky high if he had won the Open at Turn-

berry in 1994. Coming to the last, infamously as it turned out, he had not looked at the leaderboard and believing he needed a birdie, was too aggressive and took a bogey. Meanwhile, Nick Price closed eagle-birdie-

par to win by one. Later that summer, Parnevik made a television advertisement for a hotel chain, saying he had recently had a little difficulty with numbers before giving the relevant telephone number.

Parnevik first started playing regularly on the US Tour in '94 and found his strong driving and good ball-striking was an asset there. A number of high finishes at the end of last year included a fifth place at the US PGA Championship, which qualified him for his Masters debut this week. "The reason I came to America was to play in the majors regularly," Parnevik said. "I can't explain why I suddenly started getting good results. The difference between winning and finishing 30th on tour is so small."

Brad Faxon, for one, was impressed and tipped off the members at his local club that Parnevik was a man to watch this year. Last week, when the Swede

was runner-up to Faxon in New Orleans, it was his sixth top-five finish of the season. He is currently the third on the US money list with \$602,270 (£376,200), has the second best scoring average behind Tiger Woods and fourth best European on the world rankings. But unless he commits to playing a minimum of seven events in Europe, plus the four majors, he is not eligible to earn Ryder Cup points.

Whether Ballesteros will pick him as wild card depends on others, such as Jose Maria Olazabal or Nick Faldo, qualifying automatically. As an aside, Faldo declined to let Parnevik join him and Per-Ulrik Johansson, another Swede making his Augusta debut, preferring to stick to a two-ball here. Parnevik laughed it off, since that is his attitude this week.

"I have been talking to Greg Norman and Steve Elkington and they said you just have to laugh at things this week, because when you start putting off greens it can get pretty weird here." It should suit Parnevik perfectly, then.

Windsor now the main attraction

Equestrianism

The Royal Windsor Horse Show has become Britain's premier show jumping meeting this year, with the Nations Cup among the 10 international classes to be held beneath the spectacular backdrop of Windsor Castle from 14 to 18 May, writes Genevieve Murphy.

These will be the first international jumping contests to be held for 24 years at Windsor, where the annual horse show is the biggest in the world. Costing £1m to stage, it incorporates the Harrods International Driving Grand Prix (for which 13 nations are entered) and two days of dressage and schooling classes with more than 3,000 entries. The show takes over the Nations Cup from the

Popplewell punished

Rugby Union

CHRIS HEWITT

Little more than a week ago, Nick Popplewell was hoping for a place in the Lions party for this summer's tour of South Africa. Sadly for the Irishman he has been forced to limit his ambitions somewhat since then: far from walking all over sundry Springboks on the big stages of Newlands and Ellis Park, he will spend the foreseeable future walking on eggshells instead.

The unholy fuss surrounding the perfectly delivered but all too public haymaker with which Popplewell policed Scott Murray of Bedford on Saturday gathered fresh momentum yesterday when Newcastle announced their decision to fine their loose head an unspecified amount – a week's wages of around £1,000 was the educated guess – and reinforce that

rimand. Popplewell may not have made the cut for the Lions but he is available for the Geordies' crucial Courage League promotion match with Coventry this weekend.

All of which left Bedford distinctly underwhelmed. "The punishment would hardly appear to fit the crime, especially as the punch could have endangered not only a young man's sight but also his whole future in the game," said the Second Division promotion candidates in an official statement. "It is disappointing that there does not appear to have been any expression of remorse from Newcastle. The incident has been condemned by many as a sending-off offence and, therefore, worthy of a suspension."

Popplewell was given a yellow card by Steve Lander, the referee, for punching Murray and cannot now be subjected to any disciplinary action by the

Rafter apology for being drunk

Tennis

CHRIS HEWITT

A remorseful Patrick Rafter apologised yesterday for playing a Davis Cup match for Australia last weekend while he was drunk.

Australian newspapers said on Monday that Rafter, the world No 43, and Mark Philippoussis went to a night-club in Adelaide on Saturday to celebrate taking a 3-0 winning lead over the Czech Republic in their Davis Cup World Group quarter-final.

Rafter admitted that he was still feeling the effects of drink during his reverse singles match on Sunday. "I'm glad you brought that up," said Rafter, when asked about the incident after his 3-6, 7-6, 6-4 win over his compatriot and Davis Cup team-mate Mark Woodforde in the first round of the Hong Kong Open yesterday.

for what has happened – it is totally my fault. I think the one regret I do have is giving children the wrong impression of using alcohol to win matches or be a good athlete. You just cannot do it."

"It was a rare occasion for me to go out and celebrate like that," added Rafter whose two singles victories against the Czechs helped Australia to a 5-0 win and a place in the semi-finals of the United States. One of his opponents in September's semi-finals could be Michael Chang, the top seed here, who sailed into the second round of this tournament with a 6-0, 6-1 win over wild card entrant Melvin Tong of Hong Kong.

Chang did not feature in the Americans' quarter-final win over the Netherlands at the weekend but said he was open to approaches for the semi-final. The second seed, Arantxa

seed, Conchita Martinez, both of Spain, won their second-round matches at the Bausch & Lomb Championships at Amelia Island on Tuesday.

Sanchez Vicario, twice winner of the tournament, rallied to beat Argentina's Florencia Labat 3-6, 6-2, 6-3. Martinez, the 1995 winner, disposed of the South African Joannette Kruger, 6-3 6-1.

The third-seeded American Monica Seles, who reached the finals of her last two tournaments, withdrew from the event, suffering from a fever of 103 degrees and bronchitis. Seles lost to the world No 1, Martina Hingis of Switzerland, in both the Lipton Championships and Family Circle Cup finals.

Seles was replaced in the draw by a lucky loser, Diaz Oliva of Argentina, who will now face former teenage prodigy Jennifer Capriati of the United States.

Wigan chief defiant

Rugby League

DAVE HADFIELD

The Wigan chairman, Jack Robinson, has denied suggestions that he will stand down at tonight's shareholders' meeting.

"Up to now, I've no intention of resigning as chairman," said Robinson, who will face hostile questioning from a dissident group of shareholders strongly opposed to the sale of Central Park for a supermarket development.

"That is something that can't be changed," he said of the sale, the proceeds of which Wigan hope to invest in a new ground. "But I hope when we tell people all the facts they will feel more positive about the future."

Robinson still faces a possible threat to his chairmanship if disgruntled shareholders go ahead with their threat to try to vote him and his fellow-director,

The dissident shareholders believe that a new board could renegotiate the agreement with Tesco or, failing that, join with Wigan Athletic and Orrell rugby union club at a new site in the town. "We have never ruled out joining forces with anyone in the town," Robinson said. "But it wasn't possible to stay at Central Park and upgrade it. I could have agreed with the plan to make Wigan second-class citizens, sharing Central Park with Wigan Athletic. After the two years I have had, I would have welcomed the quiet life, but I knew it wasn't the right thing for the club."

Wigan are trying to accelerate the signing from Widnes of the prop forward Lee Hansen, who is due to join them at the end of June. They have abandoned hopes of recruiting the Australian Test forward, Paul Sironen, because he has failed to gain a release from his con-

61st US Masters

Andy Farrell on the battle for the Green Jacket, page 28

sport

Loko and plain madness

Ian Ridley looks forward to Liverpool's Paris match, page 29



Barcelona in £20m move for Shearer

Football

CATHERINE RILEY

No sooner has he returned to action following his third groin operation in 10 months than Alan Shearer is once again linked with a move to the Continent.

Barcelona are reported to have made a £20m offer in a bid

to prise the England striker away from Newcastle. The Spanish side see the £15m world-record signing as the ideal replacement for Ronaldo, who is reported to be moving to Italy before the start of next season.

Newcastle know any move to sell Shearer would be greeted with outrage by the Toon Army. Shearer returned to his Tyneside

roots in a blaze of publicity last summer when Kevin Keegan signed him from Blackburn and is Newcastle's leading scorer, despite missing two months of the season through injury.

He marked his return at the weekend with the goal that earned Newcastle a 1-1 draw in the derby with Sunderland at St James's Park.

Meanwhile, Newcastle did confirm yesterday that they would send a side to compete in a quadrangular tournament at Lansdowne Road in July. Celtic and the Dutch club, PSV Eindhoven, will also send sides to the event on 15 and 16 July, which will also involve the League of Ireland champions.

Scotland and Wales are to meet for the first time since the World Cup qualifier synonymous with the death of Jock Stein 12 years ago. The game will be played at Rugby Park, Kilmarnock, on Tuesday 27 May.

The last time the two teams met was at Ninian Park, Cardiff, on 10 September 1983, when the match ended in a 1-1 draw. Stein, the then Scotland manager, collapsed with a heart attack shortly after his side had put themselves on course for the World Cup finals in Mexico.

Bobby Gould, the Wales manager, has been trying to revive the home international championships, which were brought to an end in 1984, possibly for the B teams from each country.

Scotland want action at the end of May in preparation for their World Cup qualifier with Belarus in Minsk on 8 June. The Welsh match comes four days after the Scottish Cup final and Craig Brown, the Scotland manager, also wants an away fixture around 2 June to try and fill that gap. Cyprus, Malta and Macedonia have all been mentioned as possible opponents for the second fixture.

On the link with Stein, Brown said: "That would make a game with Wales a very poignant occasion. Jock Stein is fondly remembered in Scotland as the greatest ever Scottish manager. I'm sure that would be acknowledged in some way."

More football, page 29

Advantage for Fiorentina

A Barcelona squad that is arguably the strongest in Europe will be stretched to the limits for tonight's first leg of their European Cup-Winners Cup semi-final against Italy's Fiorentina. Barcelona will be without six players, four of them first choices.

Barcelona warmed up for the game by thrashing Sporting Gijon 4-0 over the weekend and were boosted by the news that both their main rivals for second place in the Spanish League and the leaders, Real Madrid, were held to draws.

But seven points still separate Barcelona from their arch-rivals and their coach Bobby Robson knows that his main chance of serving out the second year of his contract lies in taking a European title.

Barcelona won the Cup-Winners Cup in 1979, 1982 and 1989 but Fiorentina are far from overawed. Their Argentinian striker Gabriel Batistuta said: "I've never felt inferior to anyone. Sure, the Catalan side has 22 great players and lots of international experience but the real Fiorentina can beat any side."

The Fiorentina coach, Claudio Ranieri, believes it would be a major tactical error for his side to concentrate all their attention on Barcelona's Brazilian striker, Ronaldo.

"That would be equivalent to allowing a free hand to all the other nine players, all equally useful," he said.

Fiorentina, who were unlucky in a 0-0 draw with Internazionale on Saturday, are ninth in Serie A, 17 points behind the league leaders, Juventus.

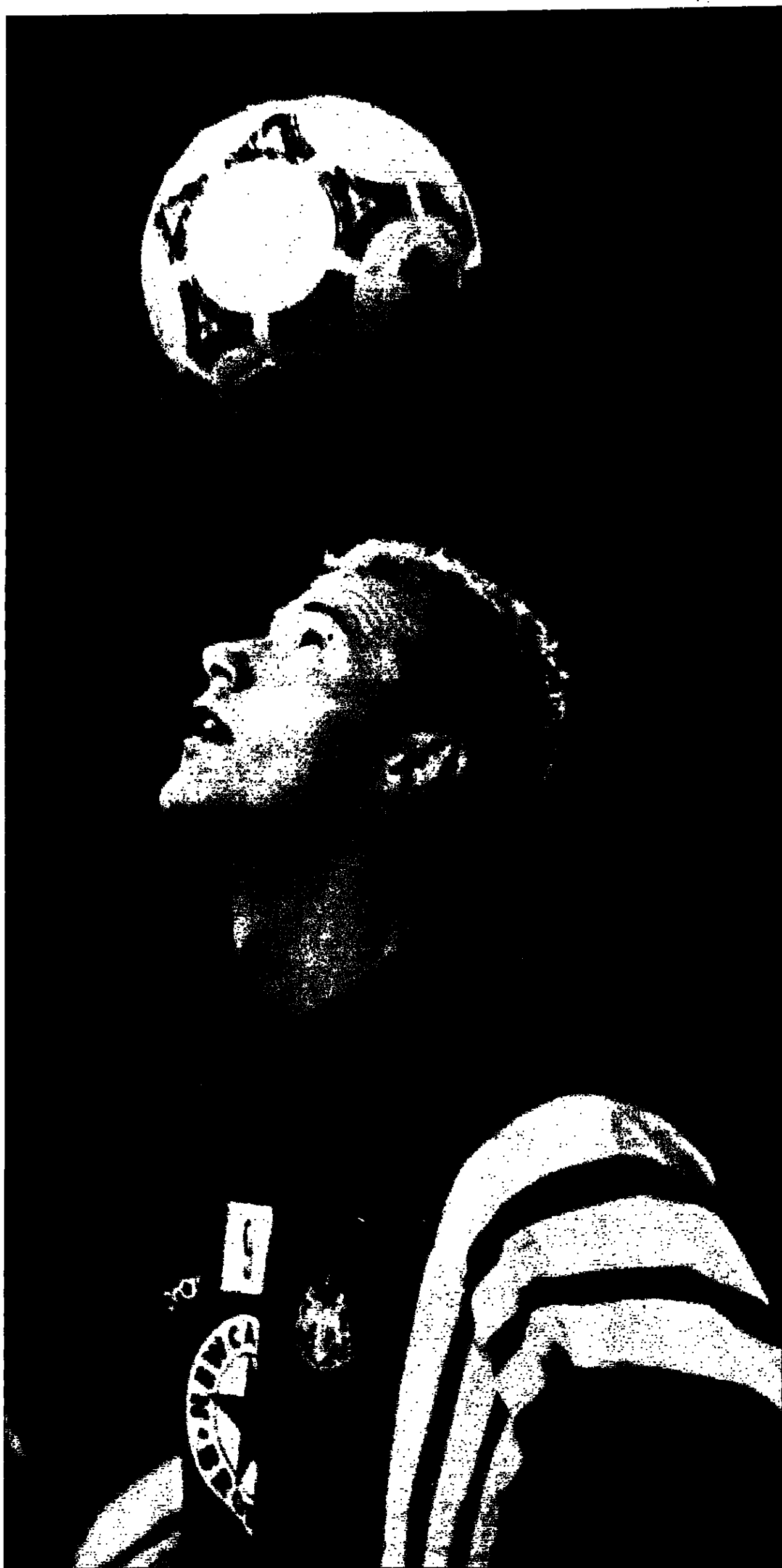
That lowly league standing reflects the extent to which the Florence club have based their whole season on their European campaign. They will be handicapped by the absence of two first-choice players. The former Everton winger Andrei Kanchelskis is cup-tied while the former Arsenal midfielder Stefan Schwarz is suspended.

Although Ranieri was giving nothing away about his plans, he may be tempted to play a cautious 4-5-1 formation to compensate for the loss of Schwarz's covering work and the extra width added by Kanchelskis.

Sandro Cois, Emiliano Bigica, Anselmo Robbati and the Brazilian Luis Oliveira could all line up in midfield alongside Rui Costa, leaving Batistuta on his own up front.

As for Ronaldo, he may be marked in defence by Lorenzo Amoroso and in midfield by Cois. Robson will be without the key midfielders Ivan de la Peña and Josep Guardiola, both of whom are suspended.

Guardiola and De la Peña tend to supply the ideas, while injuries have put paid to the two Barcelona men best known for their commitment and pace – the overlapping defender Sergi and the utility man Luis Enrique.



Heading abroad? Barcelona are believed to see Alan Shearer as the ideal replacement for Ronaldo. Photograph: Reuter

English Premier model for Scots

Chairmen from the 10 Scottish Premier Division clubs met in Edinburgh yesterday for talks which could ultimately lead to a Premiership modelled on the English Premier League.

A plan to change the current four divisions of 10 teams for a 16-team top flight, originally put forward by Clydebank's Jack Steedman three months ago, is now certain to fail.

Already the Rangers chairman, David Murray, and his Celtic counterpart, Fergus McCann, are considering change and how the big clubs can command more television revenue. They are understood to want to create a Scottish version of the English Premiership and affiliated to the SFA.

The remaining clubs would stay under the Scottish League umbrella. Any change could take at least 18 months to put in place.

Murray's Carnegie Sports International company yesterday issued a statement, headed "Scottish Football Initiative – The Way Forward".

It stated: "The Premier Division clubs have decided to take forward a major initiative within Scottish football and will meet on a regular basis to discuss the initiative's progress."

"[They] have engaged independent professional advisers and a further statement will be issued after the next meeting."

Today, the Scottish League Management Committee will meet in Glasgow and will confirm the end of the 16-12-12 proposal put forward by Steedman.

It was due to go to a vote by all clubs at the Scottish League annual general meeting at the end of May but will now not even reach that stage.

The Dundee United manager, Tommy McLean, and his Kilmarnock counterpart, Bobbie Williamson, have both criticised the arrangements for their Tannadice Scottish Cup semi-final, which they believe are responsible for fans staying away. The tie will be played at Easter Road in Edinburgh next Monday and shown live on satellite television, with both factors contributing to the modest ticket sales so far.

McLean has also criticised the state of Hibernian's pitch and both clubs had wanted the semi-final staged at one of the Old Firm grounds in Glasgow.

The Tannadice manager is unhappy with the way the SFA has promoted one of the showpiece matches of the season, and said: "I feel the tie is being devalued. We have sold only around 4,500 tickets and there is a bit of a rebellion, as people feel the fans are not being considered."

"We have moaned to the SFA on behalf of our supporters and this is a protest by them, as the tie is going to a venue to cater for television and not to Ibrox or Parkhead where there would be open spaces. But we want our fans at the game, because they cannot support United sitting in front of a television."

Williamson, newly confirmed as permanently in charge at Rugby Park, also voiced his concern at the prospect of a sparse crowd for the semi-final. "It is disappointing that families will not be able to attend as the game is in Edinburgh but I hope we can give them a day out at the final," he said.

"I also hope my getting the job will be a lift to everyone in the dressing room."

"I am pleased the directors have shown their faith in me and my aim is to lead Kilmarnock to the Cup final and to safety in the Premier Division."

"We have some young lads in our side but I am sure they will not be overawed by the semi-final, because recently they have played against Celtic and Rangers."

Williamson has made a success of his spell as caretaker manager after taking over from Alex Totten, who was dismissed in December.

Promoted Fulham go for title

Fulham and Wigan were looking forward to life in the Second Division next season after both teams secured promotion on Monday night.

The Fulham chairman, Jimmy Hill, insisted the west London side, who drew 0-0 at Mansfield, would use their last four games to try to clinch the top spot. "I know from experience that you only get a medal if you win the championship, so if the lads want a medal to take home to their wives and mums then they have got to win the championship," Hill said.

"But it's a moment of joy to be grasped and savoured and to let London know that Fulham is there by the river and it is a club with a big beating heart."

Wigan held on to Pat McGibbon's goal just before the interval for a 1-0 win at home to

Colchester for their own celebrations, and they overtake Fulham at the top by a point, having played a game more.

Now the Wigan chairman, Dave Whelan, has promised £2m for team strengthening and is counting on his manager John Deehan to steer Wigan to more success next year.

"We have been in the wilderness for far too long. The supporters appreciate what I'm trying to do for the club and they deserve success," he said. "Hopefully next year we can do the same again and get into the First Division. John knows that money is available and he can have £2m to get his squad strengthened. We are really

serious about getting to the First Division and then the Premier League."

Deehan said: "Promotion is what we have worked for and now we can go all out for the Third Division title in our last three games."

In the Second Division, the leaders, Bury, continued their march towards promotion with a 2-1 home win against Walsall, but second-placed Luton were held 0-0 at home by struggling Wycombe. The two results leaves Bury four points clear at the top.

Luton remain second while Wycombe remain in the bottom four – they are a point behind Shrewsbury with a game in hand. Rotherham were relegated to the Third Division after their 1-0 defeat at York.

only three of their last 16 games, now have five games left to escape relegation. The draw was no good to Birmingham either, as it ended their faint hopes of reaching a play-off place.

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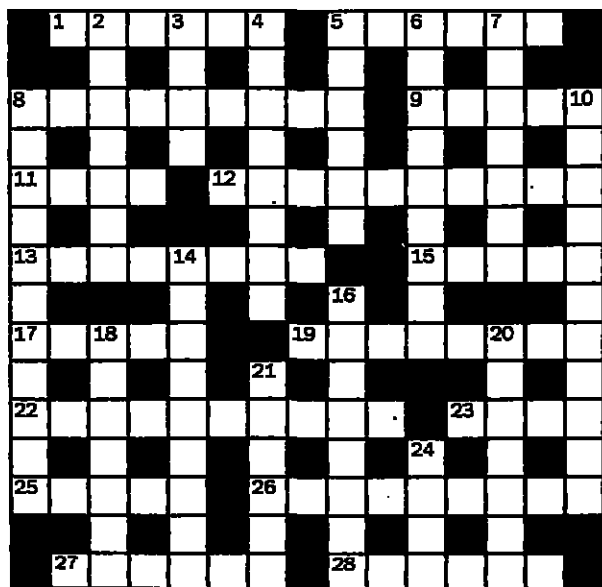
©Published by Newspaper Publishing PLC, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5PL, and printed at Mirror Colour Press, St Albans Road, Watford.
Back issues available from Fittor: Newspapers, 01983 540370.
Thursday 10 April 1997 Registered as a newspaper with the Post Office

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

No 3269, Thursday 10 April

By Mass

Thursday's solution



DOWN
10 Cap for King Edward (on a shoot) concealed by rising grass (11)
14 NASA tutor briefed him? (9)
16 Need match outside in darkness? (8)
18 Shield King after collapse (7)
20 Has confidence in rail-roads (5,2)
21 Insolvent Union covered by report (6)
24 Erosion caused by English river (4)

ACROSS
1 Moaned, without energy, and packed up (6)
5 Call from brook, ahead (6)
8 Weapon, one with boss-like features? (6-3)
9 Filled ship (commercial) gets piloted out (5)
11 Waterway for routine day out (4)
12 Pan scraper? (5-5)
13 Primitive pubs, I see (8)
15 They help when eating fish (5)
17 Cash added to US sweep (5)
19 Consignment in hold, needing a convoy (8)
22 Magic cape, it's said, cape secreted by gypsy (10)
23 Deposit, mass of snow (4)

25 Girl's troubled, rejected (5)
26 Old Fellow in crowd, or another academic (9)
27 Parent's stifled right chat-terbox (6)
28 Whip calling in last of Labour crowd (6)
DOWN
2 Snake, fine specimen (7)
3 Remove base from box, say (4)
4 Sudden, a convulsion after drink (8)
5 French/British college (6)
6 Money clinches the French support for priest (9)
7 Expert in bold handwriting (3,4)
8 Frivolous riband bride's sporting (4-7)